31/1/83

The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Volume 1, Number 7 *March* 1983

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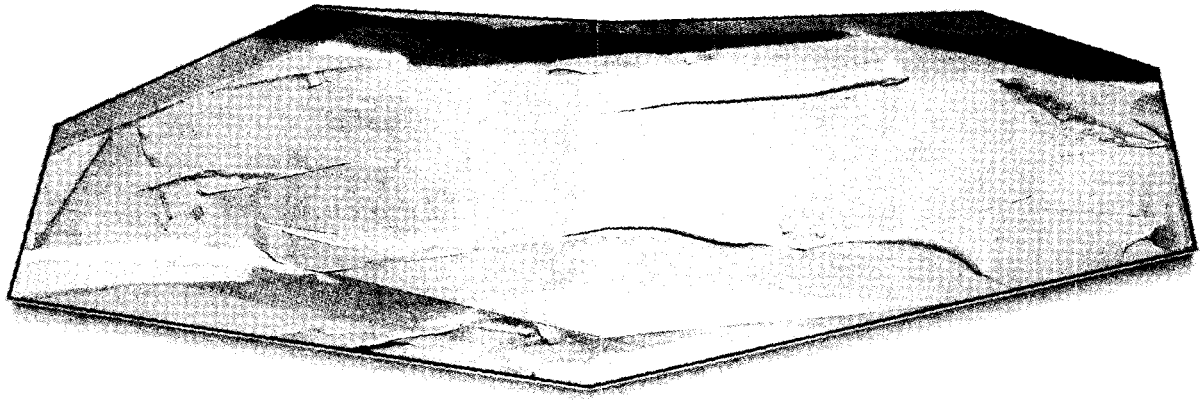

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Sanford Schwartz wrote on Milton Avery in the November issue of *The New Criterion.* His book, *The Art Presence,* was published by Horizon Press last year.

The New Criterion is published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 460 Park Avenue, NY 10022. Publication Number ISSN 0734-0222. March, 1983, Volume I, Number 7. Subscription rates: $27 for one year, $50 for two. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to P.O. Box 5194, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150.

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Distributed in England by Periodicals in Particular, 1 Prince of Wales Passage, 117 Hampstead Road, London, NW1. Editorial/business correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 5194, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150. (212) 838-2033.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

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"Thinker," 1982. Pastel on paper, 108 × 63 inches.

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Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the ghosts of the Fatherland

by Sanford Schwartz

The paintings Anselm Kiefer showed in November at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York are huge by any standards, but you feel so much easy, flowing energy in his arm, and it takes so little time to adjust to their scope, that you wish they were bigger. The pictures, most of which are landscapes, are all at least nine feet high and ten or twelve feet across; *Landschaft mit Flügel*—or *Landscape with Wing*—the largest painting in the show, is a bit more than ten feet high and a little over eighteen feet wide. The sizes themselves aren't record-breaking; American artists have been working with roughly similar dimensions since the Forties. But Kiefer's paintings of orangy-yellow fields are big in a new and different way. They aren't wall-like, they don't resemble vast, frieze-like Oriental screens, and they don't convey a sense of unruffled, intimidating power. If anything, they're close to the paintings from the Romantic era in the Louvre, the ranks of Géricaults, Delacroixs, and Courbets that make you gulp and then laugh the first time you see them because you never imagined paintings this big. Kiefer's landscapes have the same combination of earnestness and theatricality. They're the work of someone who has an almost hollow, yet engaging way of announcing that he must work big because he has great material in him.

Now thirty-seven, Anselm Kiefer has been talked of for the past few years as possibly the most distinctive and original of the many new German painters. In a report in the September/October, 1982, *Portfolio* on the summer's Documenta 7 show in Kassel, Gerald Marzorati wrote that Kiefer's new landscapes stole the mammoth international exhibition and that the painter's "name was repeated around the tables like a mantra." The seven paintings he showed in New York, all of which were made in 1981, bear out Marzorati's report in more ways than he intended. Because there is something you want to be drawn into, and, later, pulled out from, about Kiefer's paintings. Enthralling and bleak at the same time, they're like a visit to a great cathedral on a winter's afternoon, when the light is sunless and white, snow is in the air, and you have the place to yourself. As you go away, you may believe that you have taken the sacred and sad drama into yourself, and that it has ennobled and elevated you; later, though, you may be left with a feeling that your experience can't be made part of the rest of your life, and that it sucks out from you more than it gives.

Kiefer has exhibited in New York twice before, most recently in April, 1982, when he also showed good-sized landscapes with high horizons, where the broken soil seemed to be rising up and about to topple down on us. In their presentation of a gashed and violated earth, those primarily black and rust-brown pictures had a poetic and psychological depth that no recent American landscape painting could match. (They made you wonder why American landscapists have

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been meek and blandly lyrical and impersonal for so long.) Kiefer's paintings kept some viewers at a cooly admiring distance, though; a bit too pointedly grim and dark-toned, they were original but less moving than they had it in them to be. The paintings he showed in November were made around the same time as those he showed in April, yet, consistently larger and brighter in color, and containing more references to German life—such as a title from a Wagner opera or the name of a German city, which he paints right onto the canvases—they felt as if they were from a less cooped up, more liberated time in his life.

These are pictures you want to linger with, in part because Kiefer is a big and still relatively unknown personality. They hold you mostly, though, because the moods of the individual pictures keep shifting, from something enraptured to something trampled. The images themselves keep going in and out of focus, too, no matter what distance they're viewed from. Kiefer often works with straw and sand and bits of string, which he paints over or lays on top of the paint (and, on occasion, on top of blown up, indistinct black and white photographs, which are stapled to the canvas). In some paintings, the straw is meant to be itself, straw in a field, while in others it seems to be used primarily for its flame-like color and crinkly texture. But whether there are bale-sized chunks of it or merely strands of it here and there, Kiefer doesn't seem to be doing anything more than sloshing around the straw, paint, and bits of string as if in a shallow bowl, like a prospector tipping and tilting his pan, looking for gold.

Never attempting to be realistic, he yet always creates the illusion of a furrowed, wet, believable earth. He rarely spells out that these pictures are about war, either, yet he suggests nearly every aspect of it. Looking at his landscapes, we feel that we're simultaneously foot soldiers and pilots. We feel that our faces are about two inches from the mucky ground and that we're also soaring high above it. In *Landschaft mit Flügel,* he has hung an enormous bird's wing, made out of lead, from the top of the canvas. Hanging down on two narrow cords, like a medal on a pilot's chest, the matte, hammered-out, pale gray wing makes the splotchy tan and black landscape of ploughed fields and distant marshland look sparkling and seem miles and miles beneath us. We believe that there is a whole bird there, guiding our path as we fly across the vast landscape. We're reminded of the magpie, with wings outstretched, that glides across the cold winter sky in Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow,* leading the hunters and their dogs back into the village. And yet Kiefer's picture has an intimate quality, too; it's like a large version of a display that might be found in a glass case in a war museum. It's like a browning old photograph of an obscure battlefield that a museum curator has thought to decorate with a shredded object found on that field.

The one time Kiefer goes at the war directly, though, in *Innenraum,* he falters. The only work that isn't a landscape and doesn't suggest the outdoors, this essentially black, white, and brown painting shows an immense room that has dark, imageless panels on the walls, a gridded floor, and a gridded ceiling. We believe we are in a once grand stateroom that was always forbidding and is seen here in the moment before it will collapse or go up in flames. The trouble is that we register this too quickly. We're too immediately reminded of the chilling and ugly grandeur of fascist architecture; Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich* has a photograph of the reception hall of Hitler's Chancellery (which he designed), taken after the hall was destroyed—it was clearly the basis of Kiefer's painting. Maybe it's because Kiefer worked so closely from a photograph that *Innenraum,* though it is roughly as large as the other paintings in the show, is so puny and tight in scale and proportions. And maybe because the image is so photographic in feeling, his approach seems illustrational. He isn't doing more than dolling up an existing image by spreading viscous and bedraggled materials over it. He isn't telling us anything about Nazi wreck-

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age that we don't already know. But in his landscapes, he reveals the Second World War, as a subject, in a pleasurably slow and indirect way, and he blends it in with other events and themes in German history. Loamy and ravaged, his images of straw-bestrewn earth feel as if they have in them mixed together the bequests of Hitler and Wagner and everyone else going back in time to the elves and trolls of the Teutonic forest primeval.

Kiefer appears to be flaunting his Germanness, and he has been criticized for this in his homeland. According to the catalogue for his retrospective held at the Folkwang Museum in Essen in 1981 (which traveled, though with some changes in the selection of pictures, to the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in the spring of 1982), his countrymen have objected to his art over the years because, in their eyes, he's flirting with the ghosts of the Fatherland. Certainly he doesn't keep his material at an oblique or satirical distance. He doesn't want to tell us about the stunted, garbled lives that crawled out of the war, as does, say, Georg Baselitz, whose upside-down heads and figures are painted with a chick-claw hand in squawking colors. And he doesn't show the tensions in his divided country, as does, say, Jörg Immendorff, whose cartoon-like epics are often set in a sweatier version of the same glittering and disillusioning cabaret that Christopher Isherwood's and George Grosz's characters met at.

Kiefer wants to work from the vantage point of an innocent, a troubadour-knight who composes elegies for the tragedy of all German history and, maybe too, of all European history. *Balders Traum,* of an immense, black and tan field, flecked with red, from which hangs a large, yellowed branch of what is probably mistletoe (it is attached from behind the canvas), has a benedictory, moment-of-silence breadth that makes us feel that the image has as much to do with the futile waste of the First World War—or any war—as the victories or defeats of the Second. The picture seems to be less about a specific site than a recreation of a moment when everything was lost, to no purpose.

Kiefer's wounded-soil romanticism is unsettling to his fellow Germans and it leaves us up in the air, too. He is a tricky artist to judge. You believe that, even before he has thought through his individual works, he knows the effect he's after: he wants the members of his audience to bury their differences in the presence of his pictures, to be hushed, to walk out of the gallery with their heads bowed. He seems to be a liberal by temperament who is turning to his like-minded friends and saying, with the quiet, calm voice of someone who knows he has the final word, "There are emotions, you know, that go deeper than our political ideals, and unite us with all men." He is giving us the same stultifyingly fatalistic message, which is supposed to make us feel anonymous but also good, and which puts us in the position of a little boy, looking up at and honoring his father, that Michael Cimino wanted to leave us with in his movie *The Deer Hunter.*

Yet Kiefer does something positive and breezy in telling us that we don't have to tiptoe around the German past. You like the way he lumbers along at his own backwoodsman's pace, unfazed by the fact that so many painters, writers, and movie directors have treated everything that has happened in Germany between the Twenties and today as if it were a gruesome dream or a self-consciously tacky, melodramatic farce. He is pious, but his piety doesn't sum him up. The viewer feels that, on some level, Kiefer's lofty resignation is no deeper than a decal to him. It is a jazzy idea that makes him hot and provides him with the spur to do what he most wants—which is to bowl us over with pictures of overarching immensity.

When he writes Nürnberg-Festpiel-Wiese across the sky in *Nürnberg,* he may be supplying the work with the key to its meaning. Even if we have a literal translation and gather that he's referring to a festival and the fields connected with the medieval city, we assume that the words are loaded with outside references, especially since Nurem-

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berg was the site of Hitler's most famous rally and also of the war crimes trials. But there is something so appealing about the awkward formality with which Kiefer has written these words that we bypass their connotations and take them in as lovely elements in the composition. The script has the simplicity of the letters you would see on a blackboard in kindergarten; the lettering seems to emanate from the child's-toy, wood-block houses and village church with a steeple, drawn in a mock-crude, Fauvish style, on the horizon line of the painting.

When he writes Die Meistersinger in the clouds that are above the field in *Die Meistersinger,* he may be saying that it's time for Germany to stretch its Wagnerian muscles and take pride in its past once again. Or he may be saying, "Look what Wagner and his lofty conceptions have brought us to—a rank field, a mouldy legacy." Yet when you see the words Die Meistersinger up in the pale blue and cloudy white sky, your immediate response, unless you come equipped with thoughts about this opera, is that the title has an audaciously grandiloquent ring, and that it fits this mightily proportioned, straw-embowered, orange-black European landscape in the same corny and stirring way that Ile de France fits a transatlantic luxury liner, or that Man O'War fits a racehorse. Putting the words Die Meistersinger up in the narrow strip of sky of a landscape that has clumps of brushy straw all over it, Kiefer emphasizes how much of an object—almost a living, breathing object—rather than a painting, this is. We feel the distant trees, the fields, and the sky together as one noble, immense, silent creature, one that might raise itself on its haunches and slowly move away.

Kiefer's paintings have a special power for many people of his generation, and not only his fellow Germans, because they put in an unexpectedly stately form some of that generation's most potent—and least precise—early memories. Especially if you were born during the Second World War or in its wake (as Kiefer, born in 1945, was), his landscapes prod you with the idea that there are feelings stored up in you about the war and about your own past that may be more rhapsodic than, and are certainly different from, those that have been presented over the years, and that your generation alone possesses. For many kids growing up in the late Forties and early Fifties, in this country and in Europe, countless daydreams, and sometimes bad dreams, were set in a Second World War milieu that we knew from TV documentaries, picture books, photo spreads in magazines, and movies. I pored over the pages on Hitler and the Third Reich in my World Book encyclopedia when I was, I suppose, in the early years of grade school, and one of the first books that I knew was for grown-ups but that I remember feeling was as much—or even more—for me was a picture history of the Second World War, published by *Life.* It was a large, heavy volume with thick, glossy paper and a red, leather-like cover.

The images that held me most were Hitler's face, the enormous, narrow banners with swastikas in the center, and the Nazi helmets. The helmets, which made those of the American soldiers seem clean-cut, and those of the British soldiers quaint, were most frightening and mesmerizing in the pictures of the Nuremberg rally, where the helmeted troops, lined up in rows, seemed to go off into infinity. The rally pictures never became stale or dull; I always imagined that I was actually at the rally, caught in the ranks, and then I would be faced with the same dilemmas: how will I manage not to be seen? how do I get out?

Even more trance-inducing was Hitler's face. Whenever I looked at him in the World Book, I sensed I was doing something that should be kept secret; I had a hunch that people would wonder and worry about me if it were known that I spent so much time reading about and scrutinizing him. He was one of the first people, living or dead, who made me feel embarrassed about something in myself. What made me keep returning to him had to do with a test I gave myself. I think I wanted to see how I would stand up,

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facing such badness and ugliness. Would I give in? Could I fall under his power? Did I really like him? That was the one impossible thing—that I would develop some feeling for him. Whenever I opened to his page in the World Book, the same tension sprang out. He must have represented the cockeyed, crazy essence of the foreign, adult, outside world.

Germany was the country of some of our most frightened childhood feelings—it was a kind of negative Narnia or Oz, because its villains, the Nazis, were so purely evil. But it wasn't only scary. Identifying yourself, if only for a flicker of a barely conscious moment, with sleek and impassive Nazis allowed you to mentally mow down all of the people in your life who always did the right thing and won every point. Vanquished in history's two biggest wars, Germany also stood, perhaps especially for boys who weren't yet adolescent, and who were more interested in the fact of winning or losing than in the ideals that lie behind opposing sides, as a noble wreck. For a kid, whose life is full of monumental and permanent-seeming obstacles, it sometimes made you feel bigger and clearer about yourself to look out on things from the vantage point of the defeated. You didn't think you were a loser; you felt you were a winner, but in a way that wasn't so clear to others at the moment.

Based on what has been shown in the galleries in the past few years, there are no American—or Italian—artists Kiefer's age who have as powerful a connection with the war (or with landscape) as he does. The war isn't felt in the paintings of Julian Schnabel, who holds the same pre-eminent place among newer American painters that Kiefer does among German ones, and who works with the same vast, Homeric sizes. But Kiefer, with his images of tank-ridden and fertile fields, presented in ashy and golden colors, is only making more explicit the despair-loving, heroically hopeless mood that is in the work of many of his contemporaries. Many artists now seem to want to convey some version of the saddened romance that the German past and the Second World War have given Kiefer. It is as if artists want to recreate experiences that they themselves didn't have directly but whose aftereffects are swimming around inside them.

II

The man who has possibly more of those heroically hopeless experiences in him—or has preserved them best—is Joseph Beuys. Kiefer studied with Beuys between 1970 and 1972, and Kiefer's landscapes are, in part, a salute to his teacher. Kiefer's paintings don't resemble specific works by Beuys, and there aren't details in them that can be called borrowings from him. But Beuys's spirit hovers over these landscapes, and, if you are acquainted with his art, it's hard not to think of him as a kind of invisible, ghostly character in them. Beuys is no doubt the most significant artist Germany has produced since Max Beckmann, and, in a way, he has become influential for doing exactly the opposite of what Beckmann did. Beckmann became the foremost German painter of the first half of the century because he assiduously internationalized his art; his work stands as a model of how an Expressionist was able to recharge and replenish his viewpoint over many decades by absorbing the un-Expressionist lessons of classic French painting. Beuys has gone in the other direction. He has become more and more of an influence for Europeans and, in the past five or so years, for Americans, too, because he has slipped his own sensuous and oblique brand of German soulfulness back into the mainstream.

Much of his career is based on a single event that happened during the Second World War. In 1943, his combat plane crashed in the snow in a part of the Crimea that was aligned with neither the Soviet Union nor Germany. As the story goes, his buried, unconscious body, given up for lost by a German search party, was found by Tartars, who took him to their camp and revived him by swaddling him in fat and then wrapping him in felt. He returned home, to

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Cleves, which is near the German-Dutch border, after the war, and for a number of years gave himself to a time of nervous, listless self-absorption, much of it spent doing manual labor—cleaning stables, working in fields.

He emerged in the Fifties, purified, apparently, of his lingering fright, and ready for action. He has gone on to recreate, in one form or another in much of his art, what happened to him in the Crimea when he was twenty-two. Many of his sculptural pieces, works on paper, and performances tell a story of death and rebirth, of being lost and cold and then saved and warmed. Going about the world for the past twenty or so years, lecturing at universities and public halls, staging his "actions," attempting to link arms with youth and to change its consciousness, he has been, despite his witch-doctor manner, as much a living example of Germany's return to life from the rubble as any of its politicians, industrial designers and engineers, or business executives.

And yet Beuys's idealistic politics, whether described by him in statements or interviews, or presented in straightforward seminars or group therapy-like happenings, never seem to be truly what he stands for. His utopian, free-spirit belief that each of us is an artist has always seemed to be an ephemeral afterthought for him; his ardent, mystically positive social, aesthetic, and medical theories, which are linked together in his mind and which he diagrams on blackboards, like a football coach or a philosophy professor, have almost come across as a pose, and have helped to keep him a slightly unbelievable figure to Americans and even, possibly, to Europeans. What is real and tangible about him is his stricken yet dangerous presence. Beuys isn't someone you suspect you could, or would want to, have as a friend, but there is a blend of vanity, vulnerability, and deadness in him which makes you want to gaze at him and, if only for a while, float into his sphere.

He once did a number of collages which incorporated the image of Greta Garbo, taken from photographs. As art works, these pieces are stillborn and silly—an artist with a regular-size ego would have filed them away in a cabinet in the studio. But it's clear why he was drawn to her, and why he was trying to bring her into his domain. Because Beuys must realize that he himself is equal to, or perhaps more important than, the sum of his individual works, and that, like the stars of silent movies, his greatest piece of poetical equipment is his face. The most extraordinary photographs of him are those taken in his youth, in the years after the war, just as he was getting underway as an artist. There is a wonderful snapshot of him from this time in Caroline Tisdall's catalogue for his 1979 Guggenheim retrospective and another, more posed picture in the suavely produced, book-length catalogue, published last year, of works belonging to the German collector Erich Marx.

With his hair cropped close and his shirt buttoned all the way to the top, in the photo from the Guggenheim catalogue, he could pass as the creep at school who was always off on his own and yet who also made you feel as if he could be listening in for the teachers. He might also be taken as a former member of Hitler Youth, still at the ready, his body tense and Doberman-like, and yet now glazed-over in his eyes, lost within himself. Scared and sad, and seemingly in love with his haunted beauty, he appears, for American audiences anyway, as a European Montgomery Clift—a Clift, that is, who could also be wily and devilish, and who could easily spend a night or two off by himself in a forest, with nothing around him but his leather jacket, sustained by the nuts he might crack open and eat indifferently.

Beuys probably believes that the core of his work is in what he calls his "actions"—his generally slow-paced, often frightening performance pieces, where his stiff movements suggest a wind-up doll that forever seems to be creaking out its few final steps. There is another Beuys, though, a less arresting but equally mysterious and poetic man found in his pencil drawings, watercolors, and oils on paper. And it is in these pieces, though they don't represent his most

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formidable efforts, and are among his earliest mature works, that he presents the same moody, penetrating, and transfixed side of himself that is in those early photographs. It is the side of him that most haunts Kiefer's work, I think, and that of some American painters now, too, particularly Julian Schnabel.

A number of Beuys's whisper-soft, sketchy graphites were at his retrospective at the Guggenheim. The most memorable were those that looked to be abstractions at first glance, but which included, buried in the scumbled lines, images of, among other things, women and noble yet bony and wilted stags. The sketches appeared to be as frail and precious, as objects, as the few drawings which remain by some of the early Renaissance masters—Pisanello, in particular. Beuys's drawings were surprisingly similar to the northern Italian painter's drawings in spirit, too. Beuys's images seemed to be so many fragmentary, twisted, shell-shocked versions of Pisanello's world of leggy princesses, nomadic horsemen, and pensive stags—that heraldic world where the satiny, carved, and gilded beauty of the medieval castles is a stone's throw from the uncivilized beauty of the mountainous pine forests that surround the walled castles. Seeing Beuys's exquisite drawings, many of which were delicately touched with color, sometimes pale purple, you had a glimmer of how much his work is about a yearning to create a modern version of that heraldic world, a kind of outpost realm that is lawless and fierce and calls to us, too.

The best place to see that realm is in three superbly produced, large-format, hard-to-find volumes devoted to his work on paper that have been brought out in Germany over a period of years by different publishers, under the direction of Heiner Bastian. The first volume, of pencil drawings, is in German only; the second and third, of watercolors and oil pastels respectively, are in English and German. The writing is by Franz Joseph and Hans van der Grinten, brothers who have collected these works. The van der Grintens are close friends of Beuys's and also come from Cleves. Their lengthy descriptions of the individual pieces, at least as translated into English, amount to elevated gobbledygook, but that doesn't matter.[1] The viewer doesn't especially want the images, the majority of which are from the Fifties, to be explained. It's more pleasurable to go back to these books each time as if to a hoard of illustrations to nursery rhymes or tales of chivalry made by an artist whose mind was set to wandering, and who came up with pictures that, in their own unhinged way, are so many new versions of the rhymes and tales.

Beuys's drawings and paintings create a setting where abstraction and representation slide in and out of each other so easily that you forget that they were ever thought to be different. He moves from barely decipherable images of, say, a sled or a bee seen in magnified close-up or a boat tossing in a harbor or a nude woman at rest to pages that appear to be no more than studies of vapor or of fiery, phosphorescent textures. And while these disparate images don't relate to each other in any clear way, and don't, taken one by one, quite stand up on their own, they seem to connect and tell a story. Even the purely abstract pieces feel as if they contain messages. With their novel and delicious combinations of copper tans and waxy earth browns, surprisingly sensuous grays and metallic yellows, blushing strawberry reds and assorted blues, ivories, and smoky purples, these works, many of which are on pieces of scrap paper, suggest off-the-cuff distillations of remembered events or transformations of theories and thoughts into color. The viewer senses that there is a code underlying the images, and that if the code were broken we might see, among other things, what happened to Beuys in the Crimea, what it was like for him to return to Cleves, and how he

1 *Joseph Beuys Ölfarben/Oilcolors 1936-1965* was published in 1981 by Prestel Verlag. The first two volumes were published by Propyläen Verlag in 1973 and 1975.

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turned his memories into one man's private mythology.

It isn't necessary to know anything about Beuys's biography, though, to believe that these pictures are about an unhappy period for him. With their sweeping, curtain-like washes, and the emphatically fragile and weirdly tiny figures that sometimes appear in the washes, the images leave the impression of someone whose life was cloaked and hidden. The variety and spontaneity of the pieces imply that Beuys was reluctant to give up his hiddenness; he may even have wanted to perpetuate it. Though it's apparent, from his not making something full-fledged out of any of them, that he was impatient, too, and that he was working to release himself. If the underlying confusion and fear expressed in these paintings and drawings seep into you, you know why Beuys has wanted to bring more of the real, outside world into his art. The smothered and scarred quality of these works also hint at why he is a torn personality: a man who has the greatest artistic energies and is determined to leave art works behind him, and yet who, out of a belief that art itself is a paltry thing, is inclined to stomp on and leave in a decaying and rubbled state many of the things he produces.

III

Anselm Kiefer isn't struggling to relieve himself of unhappy and somber memories—he's searching them out. There is a father-and-son rightness—and edgy wrongness—about the way Kiefer complements and alters Beuys's themes. Beuys has always wanted to enchant people, and he has been successful at it in a variety of mediums. Yet, whether because of the grueling and chaotic conditions of his youth and early manhood or other reasons, Beuys himself seems unenchantable. Without being cynical, he is a very professional shaman; his professionalism is there in his face, which is lost in its own spheres and is simultaneously appraising the degree of our lostness. Kiefer, at least in his work, doesn't have that wary eye. He makes art about his own enchanted absorption with his sorrowful material, and he hopes his audience will be carried aloft, as he is.

Yet Kiefer seems to be holding back some part of himself. His pictures make us hungry for something we can't quite name. It's not that they are formally incomplete, or that we wish he had included figures in his images. An actual figure in any of the landscapes, or in *Innenraum,* the interior, would be ruinous. It's that there is a starved and yearning quality about these works. (This may be why, though they're monumental in size, our eyes take them in so quickly, and we wish that they could be even larger.) It's as if he has made so many great settings that now await the man or woman who will measure up to them and, emotionally, complete them. It's almost as though he has made sets for Joseph Beuys to finally let himself go in, to lope through as the hero that Kiefer—and, possibly, his generation in Europe—may have been longing for, and would love to have in their midst.

Looking at Beuys's work and at the numerous photographs of him that have been published, you understand why Kiefer would want to lay down some part of his spirit for this man. Like the ashen-faced, enfeebled King Arthur, Beuys says to us, his knights, "Find the Grail. Relieve me. Bring life back to this winter-bound kingdom." More than he himself is probably aware of, Beuys implores us to help him lift the damper from his zombied soul. On the rare times when he has been photographed in a jubilant (or even pleased) moment, his pent-up sexual glamour pours forth, and, whether you admire his work or not, you feel that a weight has been lifted from your shoulders, too. There is a photograph of such a moment in his Guggenheim catalogue. It was taken in 1976, after his students rowed him across the Rhine in what was presumably one of his "action" pieces. Striding along the rocky beach in Düsseldorf, swirling into his arms the hooded cloak that he wore when he stood at the prow of the boat during the crossing (there's a photograph of

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him in the boat, too), he has a big, beautiful, gleaming smile. Though there is no one else in the picture, you sense that he is moving toward other people, just outside the frame of the picture, who are as buoyed up as he is.

If German artists have few peers at portraying unhappiness, they have also given world art some of its most memorable images of happiness. It is not an everyday or a passionate kind. Best seen in the paintings of the Romantic landscapist Caspar David Friedrich, it comes at certain softened, early-morning moments, when the world appears newly washed and the sun is felt rather than seen. This happiness doesn't exist in Beuys's sculptural pieces or in his works on paper, which seem to absorb rather than radiate light. But it's felt in Kiefer's art, especially when he includes skies and clouds in some of his high-horizoned landscapes. In Kiefer's scheme of things, these details are probably no more than finishing touches, and he hardly draws them in a clear-cut way—he merely lathers on his blues and whites. Yet each time I saw his show, it was these clumps and globs of fleecy white and of a pale royal blue, a steely Prussian blue, and a serene slate blue that my eyes settled on, and that I didn't want to stop lapping up. No recent artist has made me want to stare so long and appreciatively at sky and clouds.

When Kiefer paints skies and clouds, he seems to be attempting to bring the beautiful into his art. Evidently this is a difficult thing for him. It probably doesn't square with his desire to encompass the past or to be honest about being a German today. Yet you sense that part of him wants to paint more of the natural world's warmth, and you wish he would. It is a big achievement to make us live through the old German painfulness in a new way, as he has. His bigger accomplishment, though, may be in painting a new version of German beauty.

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Voices: a memoir

by Frederic Prokosch

One morning we were eating our pancakes in the shade of the honeysuckle and my father said sadly, "We are leaving Texas. We shall live in Pennsylvania."

He said it in his gentle but inexorable voice, which gave to the word "Texas" an air of desolation, in which the chanting of the Negroes rose from the aisles of hanging moss and the fields full of bluebonnets shone with a huge, savage innocence.

My fear of Texas and of Texans had turned into a wild leaping love. Every day after school I'd run down to the creek and watch the tadpoles wriggling in the coiling red water. The glory of the butterflies with their wings of red and silver hinted at a bright, bloodthirsty grandeur in the airs of Texas. The smells of Texas held the scent of rocks and horses and salamanders. I felt a cold stab of grief at the thought of leaving Texas. But then the word "Pennsylvania" took on a dark, leafy mystery, in which great gurgling rivers poured through impenetrable forests.

So we hurriedly packed our trunks and took the train for St. Louis, and finally we arrived in a shingled cottage in Bryn Mawr.

The hedges of Bryn Mawr were more sedate than the cacti of Austin, and the faculty of Bryn Mawr consisted of lean, fastidious spinsters who had read *The Golden Bowl* and quoted from Mallarmé. I grew aware of the Twenties in the library of Bryn Mawr. The girls glanced at me suspiciously as I sat there in my knickers and read *The Princess Zoubaroff* and *This Side of Paradise*. I raced through *The Tattooed Countess* and *Lady into Fox* and I read with bewilderment a story called *Death in Venice*. I sensed in this story that the delights of the intellect were fringed with dark shadows and sinister undertones.

One day my father announced, "Thomas Mann is coming to dinner."

Some roses were put in a vase and additional boards were put in the table and the great man arrived and nodded his head and admired the turkey. There were also Katya Mann and the twins, Klaus and Erika, as well as three learned ladies from the university, Miss Donnelly, Miss Bascom, and Miss Maddison. It was all very subdued and Miss Maddison said suddenly, "Say what you wish, my dear Florence, I insist that he is effete!"

"Who, dear?" said Miss Bascom.

"Marcel Proust," said Miss Maddison.

"I haven't read him," said Miss Bascom. "It is deplorable but I haven't read him."

"Don't, dear," hurried Miss Maddison. "He is as languid as Maurice Maeterlinck. But at least when I read Maeterlinck I see a gleam on the horizon but when I read Marcel Proust I am lost in a jungle."

I listened intently to the words of these erudite ladies, hoping to absorb, by a kind of osmosis, a keener insight into the depths of literature. Their very accents suggested a familiarity with poetic essences, which seemed to resemble sunlit flowerbeds rather than a twilit wildnerness.

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The Magic Mountain was about to be published in America. Certain rumors about this masterpiece were already beginning to circulate, and the ladies of Bryn Mawr were torn between two factions: that of a "philosophical symbolism" and that of an "impressionistic visualism," and this explained their excitement in the presence of Thomas Mann, who had once met my father long ago in Leipzig.

My sister Gertrude, a Diana-like girl with auburn hair, had already taken sides with the philosophical symbolists. She was a junior at Bryn Mawr and was writing an essay on Emile Verhaeren. But I myself still preferred the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, which had a tang that was alien both to the symbolists and to the visualists.

"They have invented," said Miss Bascom, "something they call the stream of consciousness. Tell me, Lucy, what on earth is this so-called stream of consciousness?"

"It means putting it all down," said Miss Donnelly with alacrity. "I mean *all,* more or less, short of being unprintable. Dorothy Richardson is doing it. Virginia Woolf is doing it. I mean *all,* including the wallpaper and the bees and the consternation. All the things that go through your mind when you are trying to take a nap."

"Even the mosquitoes?" said Miss Bascom mischievously.

"I'm not sure about the mosquitoes," parried Miss Donnelly adroitly, "but it reminds me of the brushstrokes of the pointillist painters." She glanced meaningfully at Thomas Mann. "Think of Seurat for instance. There is a world of implications in a single dot of sunlight!"

"What a wonderful age we live in!" cried Miss Maddison with enthusiasm. "It is teeming with brilliant minds and marvelous discoveries, isn't it, Lucy?"

After dinner the three learned ladies crossed the hockey field and the family of Thomas Mann strolled thoughtfully through the garden. My mother walked with Katya and my sister with Klaus and Erika, and I tiptoed behind my father as we walked with Mann past the rosebeds.

Even the back of Thomas Mann had a dark, oaken grandeur. The neck, the ears, the shoulders radiated an invincible solemnity. I sensed that there was a mighty significance in the back of Mann. I decided to remember scrupulously the slow, dark phrases of Thomas Mann.

"The fatal thing," he said, "is that Tolstoy had no irony. It is a miracle that he managed to write as well as he did. Irony in a novel is like the salt in a pea soup. It gives the flavor, the nuance. Without the salt it is insipid.

"But irony is one thing," he went on, "and humor is another. In Dickens there is humor but not enough irony. Here and there we have a hint of it but it quickly sinks into humor. There is nothing wrong with humor, mind you. Even in Dante there's a glimpse of it. But to raise it to an art—let's leave it to Aristophanes. Or to dear old Wilhelm Busch. When I look for a definition of humor I always turn to Wilhelm Busch. The realistic malice and then the flash of absurdity!"

"Now take Aschenbach," said my father. "He is a mysterious creation, isn't he? Highly ambiguous, it seems to me. Are we meant to identify with Aschenbach?"

"Well, if I had to do *Der Tod in Venedig* over again it would all be very different. After all, relatively speaking, I was still a beginner. A beginner of genius but still a beginner. Aschenbach was treated too ingeniously as a symbol. He is the soul of the artist inextricably linked with an inner malady. The result is mystification rather than illumination. Someday I shall write a book about the malady of the artist and the fatal descent into mystification. Even in Hölderlin and Novalis, yes, even in Goethe himself you see it—this sudden wild plunge into the miasma of mystification."

My father said, "Nietzsche said that we mustn't stare too deeply into the abyss, lest the abyss should suddenly stare back at us."

Thomas Mann heard my footsteps and turned around abruptly. In his face I saw a sudden and peculiar disquietude. His eyes, intently watchful yet turned profoundly in-

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ward, were tinged with an inexplicable sorrow and despair. There was something almost horrifying in that powerfully hewn face, dark with foreboding, creased with anxiety, split in two by an inner struggle.

He frowned for a moment, then looked at me indulgently. "And what about *you*? Do you have an ambition?"

"I'm not sure yet," I said guiltily. "Tennis. Books. Catching butterflies."

He flicked his eyelids, as though detecting a wealth of hidden meanings.

"A hunter of butterflies. Yes. I see. Very appropriate." His eyes shone with fierce and electrical intensity, as though trying to detect an elusive shape behind a curtain. Then his lips curved gradually into a sad little smile, as though a longed-for vision had faded into a vapor.

He turned back and said to my father, "About this matter of ambiguity. It is like a mirror reflecting a mirror which reflects still another mirror. One grows dizzy after a point. But the essence is unmistakable. The work of art must reflect the ambiguity in the soul of the artist, but ambiguity in the work of art is very different from that in the artist, although the ambiguity of the one reflects the ambiguity of the other . . ."

I kept staring with fascination at the back of Thomas Mann. The stars were beginning to shine and a mist hung over the hockey field. His head rose from his shoulders like a moss-grown rock and the words he was uttering spread from his skull like antlers.

After he left I went to my bedroom and wrote it all down, and this was the first of the dialogues that I scribbled faithfully in my notebooks. This momentary glimpse of an abyss at the core of greatness was a turning point in my groping adolescence. I felt myself floating, like a boy in a sailboat, into a boundless nocturnal sea.

After this hint of a secret darkness at the core of Thomas Mann I was set on my journey, which was a long and hazardous journey. It was a journey through the great old cities of the world, through seaports and piazzas, through palazzos and slums. It was a journey in search of the artist as a hero, as an enigma, as a martyr, as a revelation, and finally as a fragment of humanity.

Snow

It was a wild, savage winter. Paws of snow clung to the windowsills, like an army of ice-bears who were trying to climb into the house. The wind screamed insanely as it swept around the corners and the boughs of the apple tree squealed like wounded cats. There was a fierce jubilation in this winter in Connecticut, and I dug away the snowdrifts so that I could drive to the university.

I was twenty-four years old and already a Chaucerian scholar. The traditions in my family made the whole thing inevitable. My father had decided that I should earn a PhD and I felt a mystical aversion toward the very notion of a PhD. But I obediently took the courses of Professors Tinker, Brooke, and Nettleton. I even studied Gothic under my own austere father, whose eyes grew strangely tender as he looked at me in the classroom.

One day he suddenly declared, "You have a genius for philology!"

"I wish I did," I muttered. "But I'm sure that I don't."

But he patted me on the back with a loving absent-mindedness, and this was the only gesture of affection I ever had from him.

I decided, *faute de mieux,* to write my thesis on Chaucer. I loved *The Canterbury Tales,* especially the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale. I felt a kinship with the notion of a medieval pilgrimage to Canterbury, and the pilgrims were like characters in one of my childhood fairy tales. I felt bored by Spenser, intimidated by Milton, bullied by Dryden, piqued by Pope, perplexed by Blake, depressed by Wordsworth, cloyed by Keats, embarrassed by Shelley, provoked by Tennyson, and alienated by Browning. This left Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Byron. I finally decided on Chaucer, and Professor Young guided me deftly in the direction of the "Chaucerian Apocrypha," which were a conglomeration of mediocre bits and pieces,

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none of them actually by Chaucer himself but spuriously ascribed to Chaucer by a procession of hacks over the course of four centuries. Professor Young had snowy curls and big black eyes like those of a buffalo, and I sensed that he regarded these apocrypha with a special tenderness, since no grain of literary value could possibly be found in them and they therefore contained the essence for a selfless investigation.

I was repelled by these apocrypha but infected by the Professor's tenderness. I came to look on the apocrypha as a horde of waifs, wraiths, and orphans, ugly and parentless and woebegone, and desperately in need of my solicitude. So for a year I focused my love as best I could on them and my father was delighted by my thesis on *The Chaucerian Apocrypha.* He patted me on the back and said, "Bravissimo, my boy. It is easy to write about *Hamlet,* but it takes tenacity to write about bilge. Say what you may, you have an absolute genius for philology!"

As a refuge from the apocrypha I turned to squash racquets. I played squash all winter long with a feverish intensity. Every morning I drove to the Whitney Gymnasium and practiced my arrowing drives, my subtle serves, my treacherous drop-shots. I grew better at squash than I'd ever been at tennis. I had powerful long legs and a quick supple torso, and I felt an affinity for the little black ball and the spindly racquet.

I grew passionately ambitious. I longed to become a champion. My mania for flexibility, which was disastrous on the tennis court, took to the racquet and the squash ball as a duck takes to water. My drives down the sides took on a steely accuracy and my drop-shots in the corner sank on the floor like rotten plums.

One day I drove to Hartford to play in a match at the squash club. It was a diamond-bright day and the rocks and meadows lay covered with snow. The snow was so brilliant that it blinded my eyes and the wind shot through the cracks in my old Chrysler roadster. I was in love with this beautiful roadster. It was the model called 72, of a bright canary yellow, with little wings on the radiator cap. I had bought it second-hand for two hundred dollars but it was still a lovely car and I was passionately in love with it. I still dream about this car. I dream that I have parked it on the Via Veneto and the Romans are amazed by its canary-colored flashiness.

I arrived in Hartford at four o'clock. The match was at five-thirty, so I drove down the street and caught sight of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. "What luck!" I thought delightedly. I had loved "Sunday Morning" and I was enchanted by "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle." Wallace Stevens was my favorite American poet at this time. I was beguiled by the tinkling ornamentations of *Harmonium,* which at the same time was enshrouded in a Buddha-like repose.

A lady in spectacles said, "Can I help you?"

"Mr. Stevens?" I said.

"Down the hall on the left, please."

I walked on and knocked on the door.

"Come in," said a far-off voice.

I turned the doorknob cautiously, as though it were an eggshell.

And there he was, right in front of me, incredibly close, it seemed, in spite of the distant voice and the remoteness in his eyes. When I looked at his face I was reminded of a cloud, whose curves seemed to float on the brink of evaporation.

"Excuse me, Mr. Stevens," I said. "I came to Hartford for a squash match. I happened to be passing and I thought I'd pay a call on you."

The salmon-gray eyes drew slowly closer, as though to a magnet, and an air of impending prophecy filled the room.

"You play," declared the poet, "with a *very* black ball in a *very* white court with a *very* elongated racquet. Is that correct?"

"It's a very queer game," I said. "Very pointless and very exhausting."

"I take it that *form* is as important in squash as it is in tennis?"

He said this with a certain cunning, as though probing for a weakness in me.

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"Not quite," I said eagerly. "Tennis is essentially a game of texture. Squash is a game of angles and, you might say, of masquerade!"

I was delighted to hit on a word that might please Stevens. I leaned forward in my chair, as though an intimacy had been established.

"It was very kind of you to pay me a call," he said softly.

"I'm delighted to be here!"

"But why *me*?" said the poet cautiously. "I am remote from the texture and angles of the athletical."

"I loved Susanna and the elders in 'Peter Quince at the Clavier'!"

He gazed at me with an oriental placidity. "You look more like an athlete than an aesthete," he murmured.

"I am not an aesthete, Mr. Stevens. I have never tried to look like an aesthete."

"Not *look* so much as *appear,*" said the poet opaquely. He scratched his snowy chin and his face grew still more recondite. He looked as though he were pronouncing an algebraic formula.

He relaxed in his chair, two little dimples appeared in his cheeks. He stared at the inkwell with a hint of amusement.

"Pater said that all arts aspire to the condition of music. Music being pure form. But *is* music pure form? In music there is the perpetual imminence of a revelation. This is far from pure form. It is the opposite of pure form. It reels on the edge of chaos and is rescued by a miracle. What has *this* to do with form? Pure form is merely a camouflage. Pure form is only a pattern to hide the whorls of a gathering anarchy. Tea?"

"I see," I said. "Yes, thanks."

He pressed a button and stared through the window. The room was suddenly filled with a cascade of light. I heard the ticking of a clock and saw a lacquer box which lay aflame in a ray of sunlight.

In contrast to the lacquer box the poet's face looked strangely commonplace, almost shapeless in its blandness and discreet anonymity. His hands caressed the blotter as though it were a legal document.

Then the light abruptly deepened. It was the light of a Siamese jungle. His eyes looked like stones in the face of an idol and his gestures grew slow and voluptuous and voluminous.

"But why did you take up insurance?" I said pleadingly.

"It just happened that way. It was a benevolent destiny."

"Then you *do* believe in destiny?"

"I believe in the belief in a destiny. It isn't the destiny which matters. It's the faith in a destiny, or to put it more precisely, it's the faith in the faith in a destiny. Like an onion inside an onion which is hiding inside another onion."

I nodded expectantly, waiting for a key to the metaphor.

"Delicious tea, isn't it? A friend sends it from Peking. In a diplomatic pouch. I would love to sail in a pouch. If not in a diplomat's then perhaps in a kangaroo's. It's a very seductive flavor, in a Chinese sort of way. A strange game, you say. A game of lines and masquerades, I must think it all over. It sounds extremely decadent . . ."

I was exhausted by my squash match. I lay sweating beside the bar, sipping wearily at a straw in a tall, translucent glass. Everything about me spun around, the light was like a veil, and behind it lay the whorls of a gathering chaos.

> The pungent oranges and bright, green wings
> Seem things in some procession of the dead,
> Winding across wide water, without sound.
> The day is like wide water, without sound . . .

I walked into the shower room and felt the steam swirling about me and the bubbles of soap shot through the mist like ping-pong balls. I caught sight of the soapy-smooth face of Wallace Stevens, floating slowly through the air like an iridescent bubble.

Then I strolled into the locker room with a towel around my hips and sat on a bench and started to scribble on a pad. I tried to remember his words exactly as he'd said

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them and to write them down as faithfully as I could. The voice of Wallace Stevens seemed to float through the air, oriental and aloof, smelling of soap, steam, and witch hazel.

I tried to visualize his face but it slithered into a void. It was as hard to describe his face as to describe an amoeba. The harder I tried to see it the more featureless it grew. There was something faintly sinister about this smooth, cloud-like countenance. It grew bigger and still cloudier, like the sky before a storm. The "noise like tambourines" was a dance on the edge of a chasm and the "pizzicati of Hosanna" were the emblems of a nightmare.

I drove back through the moonlit night. It had grown intensely cold. The ruts in the road burst and crackled under the tires. The headlights threw a slow wave of chromium over the trees and an undulating blaze over the barns and the fences. In this interwoven glow of moonlight and headlights the Connecticut landscape fell into a new metallic pattern. I saw a newly found majesty in the rocks and the evergreens, and a newly born splendor in the barns and the fences.

A deer stood in front of me. It was dazzled by the headlights. I stepped on the brakes and the car skidded to a halt. I turned off the lights and the deer danced away, fading noiselessly into the pattern of tree trunks and moonlight.

At Pete's

Several years later in New York I had come to be a friend of Klaus and Erika Mann, who were the clever twin children of Thomas and Katia Mann. They lived in the Hotel Bedford on lower Park Avenue, an unpretentious place favored by the minor literati. I especially liked Erika. She was a crisp, dark-haired woman who had once run a cabaret in Berlin called *Die Pfeffermühle.* She had been married to an actor called Gustav Gruendgens and they had played together in Reinhardt's production of *Orpheus in Hades.* They were divorced and Erika was subsequently married to Auden in what was generally regarded as a *mariage de convenance.*

Erika was planning an American version of her cabaret, to be called *The Peppermill,* and she was looking around for potential local talents. The cabaret finally appeared in a tiny theater in the top of the Chanin Building and the critics were merciless and *The Peppermill* was an instant failure.

Klaus was planning to edit a little monthly called *Decision,* which was intended as a forum for the exiles from Germany as well as for the kindred intellectuals of New York. It finally appeared in a haphazard fashion and later collapsed out of sheer good intentions.

I liked Klaus because of his impetuous but apprehensive form of idealism. He was a boyish-looking man with eager eyes and a snubby nose. He was puzzled by America yet enthralled by the Americans. "There is a sadness in America, an enormous lonely melancholy. All that laughter is just a mask. Underneath there's a desperate sadness."

"Tell me, Klaus, how do you explain a phenomenon like Hitler?"

"It seems fantastic but there is always for these things an explanation. Hitler was a tangle of childish quirks which gradually turned into megalomania. He was a frustrated actor who played out his dreams in front of a microphone. And after a while he grew unreal, he turned into a gesturing phantom and his mind grew hollow and his words were nothing but echoes!"

He looked at me wistfully, as after an exhausting mental effort, and then he said apologetically, "We must distrust all dreams of grandeur! They end by turning into madness and terror and brutality!"

There was something very touching and pathetic about Klaus. He wrote his memoirs in *The Turning Point,* but they barely scratched the surface. His suicide later was a heartbreaking thing. He was the child of a disintegrating era in Germany and his child-like idealism was doomed from the beginning. I was deeply devoted to Klaus but I felt disconcerted by him, as one might by a child who is showing symptoms of somnambulism. I knew that the day would come when

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Klaus would say goodbye and stumble into the everlasting darkness.

Klaus called me up one evening and said, "Bertolt Brecht has arrived in town. Come along and have a drink with us at Pete's if you feel like it."

Pete's was a squalid little bar on lower Third Avenue. It has long ago vanished, along with other landmarks. America was at war and the air was bright with tension and the soldiers and sailors strolled promiscuously into Pete's, giving a touch of casual recklessness to the sultry mood of furtiveness.

"Ein komischer Platz," said Brecht.

"Sehr New Yorkerisch," said Klaus.

"Sehr traurig, diese Leute," said Brecht, in his ribald accent.

"Sehr Nord-Amerikanisch," said Klaus, wagging his head.

"America!" said Brecht. "It was Kafka who really invented it. I am sure there was no America like the Amerika of Kafka but they've taken the hint and it's beginning to look like Kafka."

A waiter sauntered up and said, "Wottle ya have, boyth?"

We all ordered beer and gradually Brecht grew philosophical. He was a strong, ugly man with a blunt and brutish face, deep-set eyes, big flat cheekbones, hair in bangs over his forehead. His face looked medieval, like a Gothic oak carving, not of a saint but of a playful and malevolent abbot.

He had a feral kind of charm. He liked to impose his vagrant attitudes. He liked to say things that were vulgarly and blatantly untrue as though to see whether his sly subversive charm could make them plausible. His conversation fluctuated between a needling intelligence and a surly but somehow beguiling defiance. He was a bully at heart but an irresistible bully.

He started to talk in his cynical way about Klaus's father. "Always morbid, he was. *Die Vertauschten Köpfe*—what a mentality! And *Der Tod in Venedig*—he looks to rot for inspiration! He's a symbol of all that was wrong with the Weimar Republic, that agonized symbolism, that bourgeois *raffinement.* Thomas Mann, after all, don't forget it, was a bourgeois mystic. *Der Zauberberg* is an orgy of self-indulgent mysticism."

"What is mysticism?" I said.

"It's the oblivion to social realities. The flesh and blood are forgotten, the hunger and greed are ignored, all is sacrificed in the name of this intellectualized flim-flam."

I had always been instinctively repelled by crusaders, both of the Left and of the Right, and even by the ones in the middle. Even in Cambridge I was shocked by certain friends who were otherwise discriminating but who wildly swung their torch of a self-congratulatory Marxism. But with Brecht it was different. He seemed to be half-joking. His revolutionary posture seemed to be a playful gambit which provided his talent with novel and shocking attitudes. He was less a theologian than a strutting, mocking nihilist and it struck me that he was very much in the tradition of Weimar.

"My father was a friend of Hermann Hesse," said Klaus mournfully.

"Another bourgeois mystic! Forgive me, is he a friend of yours? *Der Steppenwolf* is a vomit of half-digested mysticism. It reminds me of the *Jugendstil.* No sociological context. No sense of historical onrush, no awareness of the inevitable." His eyes shone maliciously, as though he were sharing a private joke. "And as for Rilke, I abhor him. He fawned on wealthy baronesses and always made a show of his patrician fastidiousness. Rilke is worse than Thomas Mann. Mann at least smells the rot. But Rilke—nothing but *art nouveau* panthers and hortensias!"

He ordered another beer. He was looking a little drunk. He looked like a convict, with his bangs and sunken eyes. He held up his cigar as though it were a deadly weapon and in his gaze there was something cruel and contemptuous. There was a dark line of grease around the top of his collar and I saw the purple sheen of dirt under his fingernails.

Brecht's *Svendborger Gedichte* had appeared two years earlier, and the genius of Brecht was still alert and omnivorous. He kept re-

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minding me of Auden and it was no accident that Auden bore a grudge against him, since Auden was tolerant of his superiors, such as Eliot and Yeats, and of his loyal inferiors, such as Spender and Day Lewis, but never of those who might be thought to be his equals. Auden and Brecht shared a playful and omnivorous vitality, and they also shared a preening and arrogant vanity. They shared a deep psychological hunger to pose as oracles, and this often detracted from their excellence as artists. But one always felt that Brecht had his tongue in his cheek, and there was a salutary feeling that he was laughing at himself. Auden often pretended to be laughing at himself but the laughter was a little hollow; it had a tinkle of self-torment.

"Tell me, Bertolt," said Klaus pleadingly, "Which of your plays do you like the best? Erika is toying with the notion of doing a play of yours in the Chanin."

"Baal," said Brecht.

"Baal!" said Klaus.

"Yes, it's always been a failure but it has a deep emotional validity for me. There's a subtlety in it, too, Baal's relationship with Ekart—there's a whiff of something or other, just a touch of the homo-erotic."

"But you've never been a homo-erotic, have you, Bertolt?"

"No, never in the flesh but my mind runs riot occasionally." He glanced around the room with a glint of condescension. Then he belched and said sullenly, "Excuse me for a moment," and he swaggered ostentatiously in the direction of the men's room.

When he returned and sat down again I said, "Tell me, please, Herr Brecht. How do you explain a phenomenon like Hitler?"

Brecht snorted impatiently. "Why bother to explain it? He's there, that's the point. Why bother to explain a cockroach?"

"But Hitler isn't a cockroach! He's more dangerous than a cockroach!"

"He'll be squashed like a cockroach, mark my words," said Brecht, puffing.

He poked his thumbnail on the table, as though he were crushing a cockroach.

Then he leaned over the table and flicked his ash into the ashtray. He said softly, "Tell me, Klaus, *entre nous,* confidentially. Is our darling friend Adolf secretly a homo-erotic?"

Klaus looked puzzled and uneasy. "To tell the truth, it never occurred to me."

"Not in practice, Klaus, mind you, but I bet that his dreams run riot occasionally. I suspect that our dear Adolf has a streak of the paedophile in him."

He looked into the mirror with a smirk of satisfaction and picked up his beer glass with blunt, murderous fingers.

The Salon

I was invited to Lady Cunard's salon every afternoon for tea. I was pleased but disconcerted by this glittering new ambience. I felt vaguely ashamed when I entered the Ritz-Carlton and I felt a pang of guilt when I stole down the corridor. The war grew remote when I stepped into the salon and smelled the steaming tea and pink carnations and scented handkerchiefs.

Lady Cunard had her own special favorites in the salon. She loved all ambassadors but she hated all senators. She was very fond of painters but she hated all sculptors. She preferred Greeks to Spaniards and she preferred men to women. She liked subtleties of appraisal more than stern pronunciamentos and witty insinuations rather than self-righteous iconoclasm.

Two of her favorites at this time were Granville-Barker and Dr. Gogarty. Granville-Barker was a distinguished playwright and he was known as "the illustrious Granville-Barker." St. John Gogarty was a famous wit and he was known as "the inimitable Dr. Gogarty."

Lady Cunard made a point of asking their opinion with a certain suavity, such as, "What is your mellow opinion, Harley? Is *Hamlet* a disaster artistically?"

Or, "You know everything, Dr. Gogarty. Why do the French like their meat so bloody?"

Granville-Barker was a handsome and majestical man who had married a rich Amer-

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ican and retired from the scene of battle.

"It's a pity about poor Harley," said Lady Cunard condolingly. "I'm fond of Helen but she shields him too assiduously, like an orchid."

Once she said to Granville-Barker, "It is odd, isn't it, Harley? Whatever one says about Shakespeare it seems absurd the moment one says it. Even when one says that he is a genius it sounds ridiculous when one says it."

"One should recoil," said Granville-Barker, "from ever talking about Shakespeare. Whatever one says about Shakespeare will be woefully inadequate. And what is worse, beside the point. Irrelevant, to use a fashionable adjective. He eludes all the categories and yet he's *there,* so tremendously *there.* But as an individual man he is a wraith, a will o' the wisp!"

"It's a pity," said Lady Cunard, "that we know so little about Shakespeare. He seems to hide behind a veil. Or is the veil itself Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare obliterated himself as a man," said Granville-Barker, with a twinge of sorrow, "in order to multiply himself into many different men. He stopped being Shakespeare and his personality as a man evaporated. He became Ariel as well as Caliban; he became Troilus as well as Cressida."

Lady Cunard demanded brightly, "I have often wondered, my dear Harley. What is your favorite Shakespearean play? You *must* have a favorite!"

"Certainly not *Hamlet,*" said Granville-Barker.

"*Othello*?"

"Nor *Othello.*"

"*Lear,* of course. I knew it was *Lear.*"

"It isn't *Lear.* Nor *Macbeth.*"

"Purely as poetry," said Lady Cunard, "*Antony and Cleopatra* is incomparable. Is *that* your favorite, Harley? It *must* be your favorite!"

Granville-Barker was a great Shakespearean in his own secluded way. By merely uttering the title of a play he conveyed his vision of the essence. When he said "Hamlet" his face slid into a pallid melancholy, twisted with nightmarish suspicions and glazed with harrowing doubts. When he said "Othello" his eyes grew blurred with dark passions. When he said "Lear" I could see a beard sprouting on his chin.

I longed to speak to Granville-Barker in the strictest privacy, in order to probe these masks and detect the man behind them. But whenever I tried to take him aside for a moment his features grew glacial, though I wasn't sure whether it was from shyness or fear or disdain.

"No, not *Antony and Cleopatra.* Nor *Romeo,*" said Granville-Barker.

"Then you have no real favorite?"

"*Coriolanus* has a certain dignity. I used to be rather partial to *Coriolanus.*"

"So it's *Coriolanus*!" said Emerald triumphantly.

"I have abandoned all preferences," said Granville-Barker icily. "I subsist on a diet of the purest impartiality. Beethoven and Mozart—I adore them with a Janus-like equivalence. Michelangelo and Rembrandt—they are supreme and therefore inevitably equal."

I caught in his eyes a glint of harassment, and then an almost murderous flash of hatred. But the flame died away in a bland, smiling irony and his face retired again behind its mask of distant majesty.

Dr. Gogarty was exactly the opposite of Granville-Barker. He was jovial and exuberant in a way that was half-plebeian. But at the same time he believed in a scrupulous exactitude. He avoided answering questions, not from apathy like Granville-Barker, but because he saw too many answers all at once, all aquiver.

"Is it true," I said to him once, "that you were the model for Buck Mulligan?"

"'Tis true, my lad, 'tis true and yet at the same time 'tisn't true. Joyce once told me that there was no such thing as originality. A curious thing to say! No such thing as originality! Aristophanes! Dante! Rabelais! No originality, mind you!"

"Then you *were* in fact the model for . . ."

"Well, you see, my dear chap, Joyce himself was not concerned with what we call

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experimentation. He considered it rather vulgar, *nouveau riche,* you might say. Joyce was always the aristocrat. He believed in the ancient oligarchies. Homer and Virgil, there you see it, and also in Euripides and Seneca. Roman drama is rooted in the Greek and Congreve based his play on *Le Misanthrope.* Chaucer imitated Boccaccio and even Shakespeare condescended to Plautus. And of course behind all that lie the old archaic remnants, the legends and the folk tales, the roots and ramifications, so Joyce was perfectly right, it all goes back to the beginning and one thinks of the madness of all these philological quandaries . . ."

He hesitated a moment. My head was beginning to swim. The eyes of Dr. Gogarty leered at me like a screech owl's.

"Then you weren't, after all, really the model for . . ."

Dr. Gogarty raised his forefinger, as though in warning. "Joyce used to say that a writer must *glide* into his genre. Imperceptibly, as it were, like a newborn turtle. To *struggle* toward a genre is inevitably self-defeating. Not that there isn't a lot of labor. Under all great art there's an iceberg of labor. Good God, think of the *Aeneid*! All those glittering hexameters, like an army with banners! Joyce profoundly admired Yeats, he never made a secret of it, but he was immune to the Yeatsian spell, all that sorcery and witchery. He distrusted all that smacked of the *dernier frisson.* He believed in good, hard work. He believed in lucidity. He laughed at all this nonsense about inspiration, the *afflatus* . . ."

He leered at me with a fierce but affectionate mockery, and I felt that he had managed to dangle in front of my eyes, like a crazy old conjurer, the entire history of human grandeur. After this I felt a special kind of love for Dr. Gogarty and whenever I thought of Virgil I also thought of Dr. Gogarty, his armor all aglitter, waving a banner of hexameters.

After my visits to the salon I'd go back to my dreary room and write down, with a trance-like accuracy, the dialogues that rippled over the teacups. I'd write down what Granville-Barker had said about *Coriolanus* and the lyrical eulogies of Dr. Gogarty about the *Aeneid.* I felt an inner triumph, half humble and half exultant, in transcribing these conversations, as though I were spreading the wings of a butterfly.

The winter grew intense, the gales swept through Manhattan, and the war across the ocean looked obscure and impenetrable. I walked through the icy streets, feeling the wind pierce my overcoat, and the shapes that raced through the snowflakes looked like birds in a vast migration.

Then the night flooded the city and I walked down Fifty-seventh Street, pausing to stare at the Renoirs in the Durand-Ruel Gallery or the Romneys and Raeburns that were visible at Knoedler's. I stopped in front of a window which was lit with a honeyed light. It was a shop of rare old porcelain and on two china cushions, face to face in perfect symmetry, lay two greyhounds out of china. Little tassels of gilded china dangled from the corners of the cushions and the greyhounds wore collars of an embroidered gilded china. They stared through the snowflakes with a Confucius-like complacency. I stood for over an hour staring at the snow-dotted greyhounds and the war beyond the ocean seemed unreal, like a *fata morgana.*

Mozart

Sir Thomas Beecham made a point of avoiding Lady Cunard's tea parties. He was afraid of them, he said. "They are a bevy of profligates. Emerald adores this cultural chit-chat but why insist on a horde of profligates?"

"They're all profligates, you think?"

"Not quite but almost all. In America the cultural decor is entangled with debauchery."

"A pity," I said.

"It's the same thing in London. The moment they talk of Proust I immediately smell the debauchery."

Sir Thomas gave his own special meanings to certain words. When he spoke of a thing he loved he called it a "lollipop" or a "bonbon." When he referred to something

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unmentionable he called it "profligacy" or "debauchery."

He kept an upright piano in his bedroom, where he sought refuge from the twitterings in the drawing room. Sometimes I crept into his bedroom and begged him to play for me. He would oblige me with a minuet or a rondo by Mozart. Once he played a little "Nocturne" which Samuel Barber had set to a poem of mine, and he played it quite wonderfully, as though he had freshly discovered it.

"That's the trouble with America. It thinks of culture as *haute couture*. When I visit Pittsburgh or Chicago I feel a trifle queasy. They regard me as a kind of super interior decorator.

"Unlike Germany," he added, stroking his goatee philosophically. "In Munich or Hamburg they used to regard me as a paterfamilias. The Germans look on culture as a bowl full of *Schlagsahne*. Something luscious at a *Kaffeeklatsch* so long as you don't gorge on it.

Once he said, "The story of music in America is the story of the exiles. America has welcomed the famous exiles to its fat, capacious bosom but with a certain—please forgive me—a certain absence of the high fastidiousness. It has been lukewarm toward the composers like Bartok and Schoenberg. It looks for flamboyance, for the great prima donnas, and it goes mad about Toscanini and Heifetz and Horowitz. And myself, needless to say. There are the lesser lights, of course, like Reiner and Mitropoulos, but the Americans are brutal and they are left to simmer in the provinces."

He had a fine egg-shaped head with a gray goatee at the bottom of it. He looked both venerable and astute, both sensual and irascible. At certain angles his face reminded me of my father's, but it was cruder and more extrovert, more crafty than my father's. He didn't look quite English; he looked a bit Germanic, like a cunning and tyrannical Tyrolean innkeeper. He never seemed to listen to what one was saying but he glanced at one occasionally with a sly, probing playfulness.

He said, "I'd rather have *Manon* than all six of the Brandenburg Concertos. What I deplore is this contemporary mania for purism. They distrust all atmospherics, nostalgia, romanticism. They sneer at Stokowski. I rather enjoy Stokowski. Toscanini has been a terrible eviscerating influence."

Lady Cunard took me to the opera whenever Beecham was conducting. She had her private box, to which she invited her favorites. I saw Sir Thomas conducting *Carmen, Manon, Louise, Le Coq d'Or*. Occasionally she took me along to one of his recording sessions and here I listened to his beautiful Haydn, his dream-like Delius, and his haunting Sibelius.

I especially loved Sir Thomas's way with the "Unfinished" Symphony, which was totally different from Furtwängler's, without the power and the poignancy, and quite unlike Toscanini's electrical intensity, but magical in its clarity, with every note as clear as crystal.

My approach to music was always childlike and intuitive. Ever since I sat under the piano and heard my mother playing Chopin, I looked to music for a sense of exultation, exhilaration. The great mazurkas touched me more than the symphonies of Beethoven, and I loved the Chopin waltzes more than the operas of Wagner.

"Who is the greatest of all composers, would you say, Sir Thomas?"

"Unquestionably Mozart. Greatest of all is a sweeping phrase but since you've used it I'll try to answer your question with solemnity. I refrain from mentioning Wagner. Beethoven is grand but over-emphatic, he drums in his points with such a terrible insistence; and Schubert is adorable but the things go on too long, and greatness, ah, greatness! What *is* greatness after all! It's the unfathomable, the *insaisissable,* the sense of the infinite!"

I felt puzzled when I listened to Sir Thomas talking about music. Under the scornful bravado lurked a febrile fastidiousness. His sensual, oval face had an animal energy, but over it like a spiderweb hung this vulnerable delicacy, which was reflected

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in his Mozart and his Haydn and his Delius.

"Beethoven, yes, there are marvels but I really can't help wondering. I don't feel that music exists for inner probings and lacerations. I thoroughly dislike those last quartets. They push the music across the borders. Music is something very impersonal, it keeps reaching for perfection, it shouldn't *strain* for the inexpressible, it should be the *embodiment* of the inexpressible. *Don Giovanni,* for example, keeps hovering on the brink, but it doesn't fall over and go tumbling into chaos . . ."

Lady Cunard was deeply troubled and she suffered from insomnia and she badly needed comfort in the middle of the night. She often called me up at three o'clock in the morning and rambled on aimlessly about literature and music.

"I've just finished *Andromaque.* It's not as good as *Phèdra.* Racine is as cold as ice but I look for fire beneath the ice and I find it in *Phèdra* but I do not find it in *Andromaque.*"

One night she said, "I have finally finished *The Wings of the Dove.* It has left me quite appalled. *The Golden Bowl* is full of terror but the terror is always *bien soigné.* In *The Wings of the Dove* it stares you in the face and I was petrified."

Her voice over the phone was as crystalline as ever but I caught a quivering timbre, the hint of hidden anguish.

Once she said, "What is your own frank opinion of Sir Thomas? He is rather a puzzle, isn't he? He comes from a curious background and there is a hint of the parvenu but it's a miracle, that musicality of his, don't you agree?

"Sir Thomas underneath it all is extremely shy and sensitive. He loathes my daily teas and calls them 'frivolous fripperies.' He says, 'Well, what did you chatter about at your five o'clock frippery?' Virgil Thomson calls him pontifical but that is merely Virgil. I am very fond of Virgil but Virgil has an acid tongue. He seems so bouncy nowadays, I don't mean Virgil, I mean Sir Thomas, but I can't help wondering about that curious new bounciness . . ."

One night at half-past three the telephone rang desperately. Even in the sound of the bell I detected a new hysteria.

"I've just been reading *Britannicus* but I find it very boring. When Racine is not at his peak he can be extremely tiresome. Did you agree with what Virgil said today about Rimsky-Korsakov? Virgil's taste is very demanding and what he says is spiced with malice but he really went too far in what he said about Rimsky-Korsakov. What are they saying about Sir Thomas? He has disappeared mysteriously. I tried to call him in Chicago but they said that he'd left for Cleveland. Have you heard any gossip? People drop these little hints and I have a strange impression that they are hiding something from me. What have you heard? Anything odd? Have you heard about Miss Humby? Is that her actual name? It might be Hornby or even Hoynbee. They say Sir Thomas is quite fond of her and that's what Willie was telling me, but Willie is rather caustic and his malice runs away with him. What have you heard? Nothing at all? Well, I'm sure there's nothing at all. Virgil calls him a bit *pomposo* but Virgil is malevolent. I'm sure there's nothing to it. She sounds a trifle common. He comes from a curious background but where did he get that musicality? . . ."

After the mysterious disappearance of Sir Thomas Beecham the eyes of Lady Cunard took on a wilder glitter. Her voice rose into an ever more despairing timbre. Her badinage at tea-time grew faintly incoherent and the rouge on her cheeks took on a clown-like intensity. She reached out in curious gestures, half of dread and half propitiatory, and when she walked across the room she looked as though she were fleeing.

A firm called New Directions had published my translations of Friedrich Hölderlin in a charming little series which also included *The Illuminations* of Rimbaud, *The Trial of Lucullus* by Bertolt Brecht, and a group of poems by Dylan Thomas. I gave a copy of my Hölderlin to Emerald and after she'd read it she murmured apprehensively, "He went mad, the poor man. But in his

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poems he sounds so happy! Did he go mad because he was *too* happy? Or was his happiness a form of madness?"

I had grown to be very fond of her, not because of her fame or her generosity, but because she was a creature who seemed to be poised on the verge of extinction. She fluttered about the room, surprisingly agile for her age, darting from the sofa to the fireplace like some bright yellow butterfly. There was a brittle desperation in her quick little movements, as though she were aware that she was the last of a dying species.

Once she said to me, "The important thing is to have a philosophy. How can anyone survive without a philosophy?"

She looked puzzled for a moment. "We are all so frightened of death! We are so afraid of the unknown! We need something to give us strength when we stare into the darkness. A philosophy is something to give us the strength to look at death. I must look for a philosophy. Where shall I find it, do you think? Plato? Aristotle? Schopenhauer? I've been wasting my time reading novels . . ."

One afternoon I took her to the Frick Collection, a small but exquisite museum, filled with incomparable masterpieces. She loved the Fragonards and the Titians but then she suddenly came to a halt and stared with a frozen fixity at El Greco's St. Jerome.

"So fearfully *old*!" she said. "Such a very white beard! And look at the eyes! He is staring straight at death!"

In another room she paused in front of a portrait by Bronzino. "So young, so marvelously young. So decadent and yet so young!"

Then she stopped in front of Rembrandt's overpowering self-portrait. "How hideous," she whispered. "Look at how shabby he is. His face is full of moles. And the wrinkles, the awful wrinkles . . ."

Suddenly she turned to me and said, "Let me tell you something, Frederic. You are a handsome young man and that's why we love you. It is not because of your spirituality or your artistic vulnerability. If you hadn't been so handsome I might never have met you." And she smiled at me with a sweet but ominous compassion.

I felt embarrassed and puzzled. I felt a violent aversion to even the slightest hint of flattery, in which I heard the imagined echo of a gushing insincerity. But the words of Lady Cunard had an uglier connotation, suggesting that human affections were based entirely on physical attractions. I thought it horrible that the wisdom and suffering of the old should rate more cheaply than the litheness and vanity of the young.

One day Lady Cunard announced that she was sailing back to England. It was in the middle of the war and the Germans looked invincible. But there was never the slightest doubt in her mind about the outcome. She never doubted for an instant that the Germans would be defeated and her eyes began to shine with a strange new excitement.

I drove her to the docks to see her off on the *Queen Mary*. It was a dark, rainy day and the wind was blowing fitfully. The stewards carried her bags and her trunks up the gangplank and she waved goodbye to me from the rain-stippled deck. Then the ship moved away with a menacing deliberation. The rain fell more heavily and she waved and kept waving. Then at last she stopped waving and her face beyond the raindrops grew blurred, unrecognizable, as though it were gliding into the past.

The Duel

The day arrived when my "cultural" mission came to an end and I said goodbye to the salty airs of Sweden. The long snowy winter had dissolved into a luminous summer, and then into a disconsolate leaf-littered fall.

On my way home from Stockholm I stopped in London for five days. Lady Cunard invited me to tea in her suite in the Dorchester. She looked frailer, more feathery. Her voice was hoarse and hesitant. She darted across the room like a desperate canary and kissed me affectionately, first on one cheek and then the other.

"You must meet Desmond. Desmond and

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I have just been talking about Hemingway. I have a grudge against Hemingway. I detest his exhibitionism."

Desmond MacCarthy, a famous critic who moved in the periphery of Bloomsbury, was a ruminative man with a patriarchal manner. He said mildly, "It is poignant about these young Americans, isn't it? They are obsessed by this notion of the Great American Novel. They keep groping in the dark for a vision of American sublimity. I felt it in *An American Tragedy* and I felt it in *Light in August.* I felt it in *Look Homeward, Angel* and in *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* It is this struggle for grandeur which makes them seem inflated. There is an immensity of talent but there is also a whiff of flatulence."

"Is there really such a thing as the Great English Novel?" I said.

The illustrious old critic smiled with a shimmer of malice. "The Russians keep fluctuating between Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, though my personal preference is for the author of *Father and Sons.* The French keep undulating between Proust and Balzac, though my own inclination is for *The Charterhouse of Parma.* The Germans have *Der Zauberberg* and the Italians *I Promessi Sposi.* The Spaniards have Cervantes but is *Don Quixote* really a novel? It really has more in common with the genre of the mock-heroical . . ."

Cyril Connolly arrived and dove immediately into the conversation.

"We have *Ulysses,*" he declared.

"So your choice is *Ulysses*? There are those who'd pick *Tom Jones.* Others would vote for *Wuthering Heights.* Some would choose *Middlemarch* and others would insist on *David Copperfield.* You may think me *démodé* but I cast my vote for *Vanity Fair.*"

"*Vanity Fair*!" growled Cyril Connolly.

"*Vanity Fair*!" cried Lady Cunard.

"Dear old Thackeray," said MacCarthy, "was a profoundly tragic writer. Under the gaiety and wit there is horror and disgust. He sees people as doomed to an everlasting loneliness. A shadow of decay hangs over the tinkling of the teacups. What a contrast to Dickens! In Dickens all is fantasy. It is ridiculous to suppose that he was driven by social indignation. He used poverty and injustice to fan the flames of his fantasy. Now consider Becky Sharp. She is a monster of pure selfishness. But Thackeray's intuition turns her into a miracle of comedy and his compassion turns her into a paragon of tragedy."

"At the risk of seeming cantankerous," said Connolly blandly, "I would place *Pride and Prejudice* at the summit of English fiction."

"My dear Cyril," said Emerald, laughing, "you remind me of Petronius. You are an *arbiter elegantiarum.* When will you write your Satyricon?"

"I am in the process of writing it," said Connolly adroitly.

"How thrilling! What is it called?"

"It has no title as yet," said Connolly. "It will be published under a pseudonym. Something to suggest a Stygian darkness as well as irascible disquietude."

I had first met Cyril Connolly in Salzburg eight years before. He had been playfully self-disparaging and bubblingly apologetical. But now he looked older and flabbier, more pontifical. His face had grown puffy; his nose had shrunk to a mushroom. His eyes had grown shifty and his voice had grown circumspect, as though alarmed by the thought of an impending banality.

I always felt uneasy in the presence of Cyril Connolly, because all that one said was subjected to sloping scrutiny, not to test its validity but to appraise its verbal facility. He used literature not as a source of illumination but as a decor for his misanthropy and his impeccable sense of vogue.

I said good evening to Lady Cunard and wandered back through Hyde Park. The dusk quickly darkened and soon I was lost in the total night. I crept through the trees, looking for a familiar landmark. Faceless figures prowled past me, lost in a Stygian disquietude. I had never before set foot in a total blackout and London took on an unsuspected vastness. It might have been a wilderness in the depths of Uganda. I heard shufflings and bleatings and whimperings

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and hissings. They sounded like rodents slithering about in the foliage. Now and then I saw the flame of a match or the ray of a flashlight. I made my way back into the shadows of Park Lane, where a few dismal stars shone over the black endless canyons.

Two days later Cyril Connolly brought Hemingway along to the Dorchester. It was late in the war and Hemingway had arrived in London. He looked clumsy and furtive in his ill-fitting uniform. He came shuffling into the drawing room with a boar-like expression and peered at Lady Cunard out of the corner of his eye.

She gazed at him fearlessly. "Good evening, Mr. Hemingway. Is this your first visit to London?"

"No," growled Hemingway. "Not a bit. I've seen the goddamn place before."

"You don't care for it, I gather?"

"Can't say that I do exactly."

"The climate, no doubt."

"Not only the climate. It's the *streets.*"

"Is there something wrong with the streets?"

"Not the streets so much as the *houses.*"

"I see. There are too many houses."

"And they all look alike. Look at Eaton Square, for instance. The houses are all identical. It makes for monotony."

"That it does," said Lady Cunard. "There is doubtless a certain monotony." She folded her hands and stared into her teacup. "Yes, monotony. It's a dreadful failing, isn't it, Mr. Hemingway? I've been reading *The Iliad.* There are moments of monotony. All those lists, like the London houses. Have you read *The Iliad,* Mr. Hemingway?"

"Back in college," grunted Hemingway.

"So I thought," said Lady Cunard. "Alas, would you believe it, I have never been to college!"

"Nothing wrong with being a self-taught man," said Ernest Hemingway.

"But that's the dreadful thing about it! I am not a man, as luck would have it. It is so harrowing to be a lady. We suffer from such inadequacies. You as a man, and a brave one, do not suffer from these inadequacies."

Lady Cunard delivered her rapier thrusts with a lightning rapidity. One scarcely noticed the cruelty, it was all so swift and delicate.

"Inadequacy in a man," she said, "is more visible than in a woman. It can be measured, as it were. The length, the depth, the immediacy. When one sees an inadequate man one is instantly aware of it. With a woman it is more difficult. There are no commodious measurements. One has to rely on intuition, but intuition can be deceiving. Do you rely on your intuitions about women, Mr. Hemingway?"

"My intuitions aren't as clever as yours, I guess," said Hemingway. He grinned like a child, as though pleased with his own riposte.

I felt that something in the atmosphere had altered imperceptibly. There was a sense of fluctuations, changing odds, weakening weapons, as in the crucial phase of a lethal tennis match.

Desmond MacCarthy suddenly awoke from a soundless slumber. "There is always Tolstoy on the horizon," he said hoarsely. "He strides it like a colossus. A colossus with a beard."

"Beards," said Emerald rather desperately, "are the *sine qua non* for a novelist. Charles Dickens had a beard. George Meredith had a beard. Did Dostoyevsky have a beard? I admire your beard, Mr. Hemingway."

"*Chacun à son goût,*" said Hemingway craftily.

I kept glancing at Hemingway with an eager fascination. This was the first time I'd seen him. I'd been disappointed at first. He seemed so gauche and unreal. But now he was materializing, like a beast in the jungle. I watched the massive jaws, the shaggy beard, the sullen smile. I saw the sulky glint in the warm, handsome eyes. There was a sheen of animal stealth and of carnivorous stupidity, but even the stupidity was part of his charm.

Yet something was wrong. I couldn't pin it down. It hovered in mid-air, like a stench in the jungle. He kept shifting in his chair

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with a glare of accusation. Some deep-seated malady was obviously troubling him.

I had never forgotten the day in Sylvia's bookshop in Paris when I picked up *in our time* and decided to buy it. I had detected a curious smell in this slim little volume and when I leafed through the pages it exuded an arcane spell. And nothing that Hemingway wrote later, not even *A Farewell to Arms,* had quite the clean, hard compulsion of the stories of *in our time,* in which the words gave out a glint of animal fear and animal violence.

"And what do you think of Russia?" said Lady Cunard tensely. "Do you have any opinions about the puzzle we call Russia?"

"There is the pro as well as the con about Russia," muttered Hemingway. "As with all these fucking countries. With Italy, England, Spain. I'm not sure about Patagonia. I've never been to Patagonia."

"I'd adore," said Lady Cunard, "to go with you to Patagonia! What a delicious time we'd have! Down in the wilds of Patagonia!"

Ernest Hemingway smiled suddenly as he gazed at Lady Cunard. It was a beautiful white smile: a smile of victory, of glory. He had won some curious triumph, the nature of which eluded me, and it had changed his sullen truculence into a great glowing sweetness.

After he had left Cyril Connolly whispered into my ear: "The first round went to Emerald. After that it was all Hemingway. She fought him tooth and nail but in the end it was all Hemingway."

Lady Cunard glanced at Connolly, seized by a sudden divination. I detected in her eyes the smouldering glow of defeat, which was followed instantaneously by a quick flash of triumph.

She said softly, "I was startled. Not a bit what I expected. You may think it bizarre of me but he struck me as androgynous."

"A very peculiar word to apply to Hemingway," said Connolly.

"I am sure that it is," said Emerald. "It is not the *mot juste,* perhaps. But that's how he struck me. Distinctly emasculated."

And her eyes shone with the ice-blue luster of vengeance.

After the others had gone I stayed on for a little while. There was a flicker of panic in the eyes of Lady Cunard. She made some floating gestures, like a swimmer in the sea.

She glanced hurriedly at the roses. She was looking for something to comfort her. She looked at me tenderly and held up two fingers, as though she were clasping an invisible rose.

"How clever of you, Frederic. You have this eerie knack. You somehow coax people into saying not what they really *want* to say but into what they all of a sudden cannot help saying. You catch them on the wing. Maybe you have learned it from your butterflies. How wicked if you ever wrote it into a book, how very mischievous!"

Her mask-like little face was suddenly splintered by grief. Under the powder and the rouge I saw the creases of terror. She was very old now and she was afraid of the coming loneliness. All that desperate ornamentation, all that flashing innuendo, all those playful repartees about Racine and Henry James: it was all a frantic struggle against the oncoming loneliness.

I got up and said goodbye and her face broke into a smile. I stared at her in amazement. She looked like a child again, a spoiled tempestuous girl on the brink of a new excitement.

She said, "There's a glow in the air. Have you noticed? I feel it in my bones. The war is nearly over!"

She was, as Connolly said, "the final cry of a dying epoch. She sparkled like champagne, she glittered like a diamond, but the airs of the future will not tolerate another Emerald."

Death of Wilde

It was autumn and a lilac-colored haze hung over the Seine—the haze that one sees in some of the paintings of Monet, seductive in its dappled and insidious melancholia. Even the plane trees, nearly naked, had a coyness

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about them, like a row of ballerinas posing in front of the final curtain.

He was sitting behind his desk in a red velvet dressing gown. A last ray of sunset touched his finely hewn face, which had acquired in old age a certain pale, autumnal charm. What surprised me was the air of remoteness and gentleness, yet at the same time I vaguely distrusted and even feared him.

He had recently published his *Feuillets d'Automne,* as well as a highly fastidious anthology of French poetry. He said softly, "You may think it odd of me, but the climax of my life was when Valéry dedicated *La Jeune Parque* to me. It was the loveliest thing that ever happened to me. I felt like kissing Valéry. It was in 1917 and it made the war seem almost palatable."

I said shyly, "And what do you think of the American poets? Do they mean anything to you?"

"Whitman, naturally. But here perhaps there are some non-poetical factors. One cannot read Whitman without feeling the man in front of one. One feels that desperate yearning, that aching unfulfillment, one positively smells him with his lust and his nostalgia. This perpetual rustic lust—I suppose you have it in America in the farms and the lumber camps, in the great foaming deltas. It is rank with the smell of summer and it all seems rather sad. Yet it had its own fulfillments in the cornfields and the forests. And crude though it was, it was preferable to the atmosphere in France, to the moonings and swoonings of a pimply adolescent in Montmartre. When I look into the mirror I am struck by an air of asceticism, and even at moments by an aura of sanctity. I was never at all handsome and at times I resented my homeliness but now I can pride myself on a certain gray dignity, the cool impersonal air of those who have already indulged their lusts. This Whitman never had, he was merely a sad old man with a beard. He had wonderful blue eyes in which the lust was still alive, still blatant and tormenting in the midst of the cornfields and the lumber camps."

He peered at me mischievously. "Are you writing all this down? Is that an American habit? To write the whole thing down? Well, write it all down, then. I'm too old for indiscretions. I'm sure that you'd like to know how I feel about Proust. That's the first thing people ask me. My feeling about Proust. It is generally supposed that I had my qualms about Proust. On the contrary, I was a very fervent admirer of Proust and when people keep on saying that I turned down *Swann* at Gallimard's they forget that one is busy, that one simply can't read *everything,* and Proust had this aura of a faded social butterfly. But after I brought myself to read that little masterpiece I never wavered for an instant in my admiration of Proust. About the man himself I confess I was rather puzzled. At first I used to feel that he had no inner robustness. I was wrong. He had an enormous inner robustness. Not like Whitman. Whitman had an air of external robustness but one feels that he lacked that deep, interior fortitude. Perhaps what I mean is that he was a bit sentimental. His heart bled too much and he wore it on his sleeve. Magnificent though he was, he lacked that inner fortitude. However, back to Proust. You foreigners are wrong. I suspect that you revere him for imaginary reasons. It is erroneous to suppose that Proust was an innovator. It is purely that he did what had often been done before but did it with infinite pains and inexhaustible cunning. That's what matters, precision and cunning, not audacity and braggadocio. One hears in Proust frequent echoes of Benjamin Constant and Saint-Simon and even a hint of the *Confessions* of Rousseau."

"But those wonderful motifs," I said, "like the longing for Venice, and the cobblestones . . ."

"Beautifully done, I quite agree. I don't dispute that it is well done. But it all is entirely within the French tradition and perhaps you foreigners don't quite appreciate this. And as for the homosexuality, well, one hesitates to dwell on it since often with the invert it tends to obliterate the other things, not *always* or *entirely,* I don't wish to exag-

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gerate, for the pervert often has a startling virility of insight, an objective impartiality which eludes the heterosexual, but to the artist it is crucial not to let this abnormality, if you wish to call it that and I am far from sure that I do, it must never be allowed to become a *cause célèbre* or *Weltanschauung* or even an exclusive or obsessive way of life. One might regard it as a kind of talisman, or even a stroke of luck, but a luck and a talisman that must never be abused. It should be sipped at very delicately, like a fine old brandy. There is always this danger but one really must resist it. Proust managed to resist it by the skin of his teeth, but our charming friend Cocteau has never even tried to resist it."

I said rather nervously, "And what about Dostoyevsky?"

"Ah, of course, there is Dostoyevsky. There is always Dostoyevsky. You are a Slav and I knew that you were going to steer me to Dostoyevsky. Very well, have your way. I have been steered to Dostoyevsky. But now that I'm there I find that I have nothing to say about him. I feel ashamed. I feel appalled. To have nothing to say about Dostoyevsky! Dostoyevsky was once very close to me, he was at the core of my thoughts on the novel, and I feel like a traitor to have no words for you on Dostoyevsky. I've been rereading Conrad recently. I am still a faithful fan of Conrad's. I dedicated my own *Voyage au Congo* to Conrad. There you are—Joseph Conrad, the aristocratic moralist, fascinated by the *louche,* the corrupt, the *ténébreux,* but still profoundly horrified, shrinking from the actual recognition, afraid to confront the beast in the jungle. Now look at Dostoyevsky. He was slovenly and sentimental but he was always face to face with the beast in the jungle. One enters his shadowy world, which is never quite the real world, it isn't Tolstoy's world of a stupendous outer reality. It is a darker and stranger and funnier and fiercer world but not for a moment does one believe that it is real. It has its own odd reality but it is the reality of the raconteur, of a very peculiar and ingenious raconteur. So that his moralistic views, however passionate or potent, strike us as merely a phase of his own macabre dream. Which of course is as it should be. It is that which makes an artist. So you did steer me back to Dostoyevsky after all!"

I felt a curious thing: that these reflections of André Gide's were not so much (however true and convincing they seemed to be) an actual expression of his thoughts and convictions but rather the expression of a transitory intimacy with me, like that of a brilliant chess player with an anxious young opponent.

And I felt another thing. As I kept listening to Gide I realized what miraculous things they all were—words, phrases, parentheses and antitheses, digressions and intimations. Growing up over the centuries to describe, convince, communicate, and then proliferating into an infinity of patterns and ramifications, but still retaining a strange and primeval sort of purity, so that the voice of the savage still echoes in the words of the erudite. As I listened to André Gide I could hear, under the lucidity, the infinite gradations of primeval incantations.

I said abruptly, "Do you still remember Stalin, M. Gide?"

He pressed his thumbs together. "Aren't you being the least bit tactless? You almost sound like a journalist! You must *never* become a journalist!" His severe didactic face, with its quick piercing glances, made me think of Dante's lines about Brunetto Latini, whose glance was like a tailor's threading a needle. "Yes, I do remember Stalin. He stood behind me at Gorky's funeral. He had a handsome wild face, like a bloodthirsty gypsy's, and he looked a bit drunk, and it *may* have been with vodka but it also may have been with the perfume of his own inner ferocity. There is *that* kind of drunkenness and it's beguiling but also terrifying, and he reminded me of that wonderful tale of Tolstoy's, *The Cossacks.* Why on earth did those people up in Stockholm miss their chance? Just imagine! They could have awarded their opening salvo to Tolstoy, and what an unimaginable prestige that would have brought! But they missed their chance,

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the idiots. They gave it to Sully Prudhomme. One might suspect with a painful effort why they disregarded Proust, but one would have to live in Stockholm to see why they chose Sully Prudhomme! Yes, it was back in 1936 that I met Stalin at Gorky's funeral. I also met Molotov but one tends to forget Molotov. Stalin was manifestly drunk but he was shy and rather handsome and I felt distinctly captivated, you might almost say inspired. It was later that I felt the loathing and the horror and disgust."

There was a dark little silence. Gide's face looked suddenly pendulous, as though a weight had been attached to his cheeks and his chin.

I tried to change the subject. "You always adored Chopin!"

He smiled with relief and looked at me tenderly. "One must be careful with Chopin. It is criminal to read too much into Chopin. Or even into Mozart. Or *even* into Beethoven. But one can't resist it with Beethoven. With Mozart or Chopin one must avoid like the cholera even the slightest inkling of elaboration. It is strange about peasants. I think of Mozart as a peasant. There is an earthiness in peasants which preserves them from vulgarity. Speaking of peasants, there is something in *you* which is very peasant-like. I detect in your eyes a peasant cunning and a peasant innocence. They often go together. It is perhaps a Slavic quality. I loved *Les Asiatiques.* Thank you for sending it to me, but Gaston Gallimard had already given me a copy. It is audacious but ambiguous, you have borrowed from Gobineau and Montesquieu, there's a hint perhaps of Perse, there is even a whiff of *Candide.* It is brilliant but at the same time peculiarly peasant-like and it has this unmistakable Slavic earthiness. Now Beethoven was *not* a peasant. Magnificent though he was, there is always that musty aroma of the bourgeoisie. I don't think that Arthur Rubinstein knows how to play Beethoven. He is too grand and impersonal, too much the aristocrat. Nor Horowitz. Even Horowitz is wrong about Beethoven. He is miraculous with Chopin, even better, perhaps, than Rubinstein, but he's wrong about Beethoven. He lacks the German *Innerlichkeit.* Beethoven's glorious but remember, there is always the smell of the *Kaffeeklatsch* and one mustn't be a snob or an aristocrat with Beethoven."

"Walter Gieseking?"

"Let us leave our Debussy for Gieseking."

"Arthur Schnabel?"

"Yes, Schnabel was in the tradition of the *Kaffeeklatsch.* He had that bourgeois *Innerlichkeit* and he knew how to play Beethoven."

"One last question, M. Gide. How did you feel about Oscar Wilde? I won't write it down if you'd rather that I didn't."

"Write it down, write it down! There is nothing to be ashamed of! Poor old Wilde, what can one say? He was bloated and tremulous. One felt a pity for Oscar Wilde. He positively begged for pity. He was gallant to the end but one felt that he begged for pity. I still feel guilty about Wilde. He'd wander all alone to Le Rugby at night and stare with bulging eyes at those moth-eaten gigolos. Or if it wasn't Le Rugby it was down in the rue de Lappe. If it wasn't the third-rate gigolos it was the pimps and the pickpockets. He lived in a small hotel in the rue des Beaux-Arts. Or am I mistaken? Was it the rue d'Alsace? I believe in destiny and the destiny of Wilde was to die in the rue d'Alsace, or it may have been the rue des Beaux-Arts. He died in 1900 and you've probably heard the story. There were only seven people who followed the funeral. It was a dark November day and there were wreaths on the coffin and only a single wreath had the courage to have an inscription. It was a wreath from his hotel patron and it was marked *'à mon locataire.'* Rather brutal, the whole thing was. The English are very kind but, alas, their kindness is highly selective. Maybe his verses are bad and I found *Salomé* indigestible, but to make all that fuss about a trivial thing like sodomy! His body was moved to Père Lachaise later on. That was a gesture, at any rate, and Epstein did a monument. The French at least have a sense of ritual and obeisance. But the English—what a fuss to make about a bagatelle like sodomy!"

I said goodbye to Gide and walked back

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toward the river, which had slid into a dark and suicidal sadness. No river in the world is so sad as the Seine. It flows past its banks, opaque and inconsolable, as though joy had died in the world and love had turned into suffering. The Quai Voltaire was beginning to twinkle, not invitingly but bleakly, and the tramps along the quay were covering their bodies with old newspapers.

The Rooster

I abandoned my Roman novel, which seemed to lie stifled among the catacombs. I turned back to the rhythms of poetry, which were freer than those of prose. The patterns of poetry brought a liberation from those of prose, which turned into a stultified and stony rigidity. I was writing a series of songs to be set to music, each in its own special mode—a gavotte, a waltz, a fox-trot—and the precision of form brought a delightful freedom with it, as though the symmetry of the vessel contained an inner fluidity.

This new joyful mood seemed appropriate to Venice and one morning I drove northward on the Via Cassia toward Venice. I took the usual road to Florence through Viterbo and Siena. I planned to spend a week in Florence but I grew restless after a day. I hurried on to Bologna and Ferrara and Padua. I left my car in Mestre and took the boat to Venice, and rode in a gondola down the sunlit canals.

I caught my breath with joy when I finally stepped into the Piazza. Even the flagstaffs looked jubilant as they sprang from their pedestals. The basilica crouched like a many-headed monster and the campanile reached into a cloud-sprinkled sky. The lagoon looked alive, as though teeming with dolphins, and the gong from the Orologio was a summons to a bygone carnival.

I stayed at the Bauer-Gruenwald because it looked at the Salute. The dome of the Salute rose over the giant columns and soared toward a grand tranquility which was symbolized by the Virgin. I looked at her in the morning, when she welcomed the snowy clouds, and I looked at her at noon, when she gazed at the passing gondolas, and I looked at her at night, as she floated among the stars. I stayed at the Bauer-Gruenwald purely because of the Virgin Mary.

I was having my breakfast one day on the hotel terrace. It was a crisp, brilliant morning and everything sparkled. The mooring posts glistened like freshly painted barber poles. The *motoscafi* churned past the church of the Salute and a distant *vaporetto* was moving toward the Lido. I broke my toast into crumbs and tossed them into the water. I didn't see any fish but it didn't really matter. I kept tossing my crumbs to imaginary fish and I felt that I was participating in the life of the Grand Canal.

A man laid down his newspaper at the neighboring table. He had finished his coffee and was staring at the water. He seemed to catch sight of something strange in the water, floating idly among the ripples, which looked like molten bronze. He was a thick Jewish man with pouting lips, a bulbous nose, suspicious eyes, and an air of sweating immobility. He looked like an elderly rug-seller who was trapped in a Turkish bath.

He suddenly caught my eye and a grin of amusement crossed his face. But then he looked uneasy again and turned away his head, as though alarmed by the thought that I had guessed some guilty secret. I said, "I own a print of your 'Amants de la Tour Eiffel.' It cheers me up whenever I look at it. It bristles with happiness. I especially like the rooster. He looks so conceited."

"All roosters are conceited," said the painter gravely. "They have reasons for being conceited. A rooster is very splendid. He exults and crows and dominates. He is an emperor on his dung-heap."

"You like roosters more than swans? Have you never painted swans?"

"I much prefer the rooster. A rooster is an aristocrat. A swan is also conceited but in a very bourgeois way. He tries to be an aristocrat but he doesn't quite succeed. A swan is content merely to look at his own reflection

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but the cock looks at the sun and sees his reflection in the sun."

I said, "Picasso likes roosters but he seems to have abandoned them. He likes bulls better than roosters. They have a bigger, blacker virility."

"He has abandoned us all. He has crawled back into a shell. It's a very fine shell but a shell is still a shell."

His face seemed to swell with childlike reproachfulness. There were soft, greedy lines on his sweating cheeks but they were not the wrinkles of age or the creases of wisdom but the pure, gentle lines on the face of a giant infant.

"But he is still a great genius, wouldn't you say, in spite of everything?"

"When a talent reaches a point of such abundance you can call it genius."

"But you say that he has abandoned us. What do you mean? How has he abandoned us?"

"In his innermost heart Picasso has betrayed himself. Yes, Picasso has been guilty of a very special treachery. I refer not to the Communism, for I am indifferent to all politics. I refer to the humanity, for the man had a great humanity. But now he has crawled back into his shell and defies humanity. There are times when it strikes me that Picasso is a failure. There is an arrogance, like a rooster's, in flaunting all that talent. I love roosters, as I say, but art is more than being a rooster. It must aim at something higher and yet humbler than a rooster."

I have forgotten exactly why Marc Chagall had come to Venice. It may have been the Biennale or perhaps it was something else. As he sat there in the sunlight, sweating among his indignations, he seemed quite unaware of and indifferent to Venice: to the glittering canal and the dappled white clouds and even to the sweetness and solicitude of the Salute. He scratched his head absently and scowled at his newspaper.

He took out his wallet and studied a slip of paper. Then he tucked it back in the wallet and laid the wallet on top of the newspaper.

At that moment a gust of wind swept the paper from the table and carried it off over the Grand Canal. The wallet slid away, green and sleek, like a frog. It leered at the sun and dove nimbly into the water.

Chagall sprang to his feet and waved his arms with horror. I ripped off my jacket and jumped into the water and snatched at the wallet as it spiraled into the depths. A minute later I was clutching at one of the gilded barber poles and the hotel *ganzer* helped me climb back on the pier.

Chagall's ruddy face broke into a big delighted grin. "What a clever man you are! *How very quick! How very athletic!* And you did it all so cheerfully! It was very gay and very amusing! Come, dry yourself in the sun and I shall draw a little sketch for you."

I watched him draw a rooster on the back of the menu and over the rooster he drew a big, blazing sun, and in the middle of the sun he drew a reflection of the rooster.

I remember him still: the playful joy in his eyes, a joy which was spiced by an old Hebraic cunning and darkened momentarily by an old Hebraic sorrow. Chagall was still as remote from me as a child playing with pebbles on the shore of an ancient and undulating sea, but the joy in his eyes, tinged with sorrow and cunning, was as eternal in its way as the sun over the Salute.

As I walked from the hotel toward the church of San Moise, this blending of grief and slyness and infantile amazement melted into the dark, ornate church, the gong of the Orologio, and the cackling call of the unseen gondoliers.

That night in my bedroom, as I looked at the Salute, I wrote a little poem which I called "Song of a Cock." I tried to catch the rooster and his wild preening music, conceited and ecstatic, filled with sunlight on a dung-heap.

But this rooster song kept floundering about in mid-air, like a rooster who is suddenly dislodged from his dung-heap. It kept darting hysterically from one line to the next, trying vainly to recapture its feathery dignity.

And then in the final stanza the song

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settled down again, it flattened its wings and smoothed its gaudy feathers and the song started to crow again, exultant and conceited.

The Metaphysical Piazza

After breakfast every morning I'd read until noon. I read the comedies of Goldoni, which throbbed with a humor that was peasant-like and at the same time highly sophisticated. I caught a whiff in Goldoni of the old commedia dell'arte, where the comical portraits descended into caricature; they were filled with clowns and mountebanks and acrobats and innkeepers; but I also caught the musk of powdered wigs and masqueraders, with their towering hats and artificial noses.

I was enthralled by this vision of a stage where human beings enhanced their humanity by putting on noses. Far from growing more artful they somehow deepened their naturalness, and their foibles and eccentricities looked all the more convincing. Once at a carnival, where the dancers gathered in the Campo San Angelo and scampered about on the bumpy flagstones, I was amazed when they took off their masks at midnight, and instead of looking more human they looked insipid and expressionless. The mask had been discarded and a deeper vacancy was revealed. It was obvious that the Venetians were intended to wear masks and their natures emerged only in the masks of a torchlight carnival.

After reading my Goldoni I went strolling through the city. I prowled among the courtyards and the crannies of the Frezzeria. I paused on the bridges, sniffing at the stench of the canals, which gave an acid undertone to the rich Venetian atmosphere. I peeped into a bakery and saw the baker kneading his dough, and I glanced into a butcher shop where a boy was hacking at a torso. I paused in the doorway of a woodcutter's shop where a hairy Hercules was carving an urn. But the place I liked best was the old glass factory behind the Doges' Palace. A rich rosy glow suffused the cave-like interior, where the half-naked glaziers moved about like magicians, transforming the glowing worms of glass into goblets, fish, and dolphins.

My favorite building in Venice is not the Doges' Palace, but the Libreria Vecchia, which faces it. In front of it, like symbols of a sea-haunted grandeur, rise the two great monoliths from Constantinople: the one with St. Theodore, the patron saint of Venice, and the other with the big winged lion from Assyria. To the right of these columns stands the Libreria Vecchia, whose breathtaking facade is Sansovino's masterpiece.

Sansovino succeeded in the formidable task of creating a worthy pendant to the Doges' Palace. Even Palladio himself thought it the loveliest building since antiquity. There is a fresco by Titian on the ceiling of the atrium and there are paintings in the hall by Tintoretto and Veronese. In 1362 the poet Petrarch gave his books to Venice and this incomparable treasure forms the nucleus of the Biblioteca.

An exhibition was held in the Libreria Vecchia of the recent paintings by Giorgio de Chirico. They were brutalized by the critics, who called them fatuous and reactionary. The coloring was "adipose," the patterns were "platitudinous," the brushwork was "slap-dash," the conceptions were "puerile." All the poetry and originality of the early de Chirico had vanished and all that was left was "a potpourri of passé imagery."

All this was cruel but unfortunately it was true. I kept looking for a trace of the old haunting magic. I was obsessed at this time by my thoughts of a declining artistry. I kept thinking of all those talents that had been prematurely ruined, either by death or decay, or the onset of insanity. I thought of Keats and Chatterton, of Cowper and Hölderlin, of Schumann and Bellini, of Poe and Rimbaud: each destroyed in his own way by what seemed like bad luck but what on closer inspection looked like an inexorable destiny.

I thought of all the traps along the road of

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the struggling artist: success and failure, drink and profligacy, disease and loneliness, melancholia and laziness, the delirium of madness and the horrors of vanity. Cyril Connolly wrote a book called *Enemies of Promise,* but there were enemies still more insidious than those described by Cyril Connolly. It occurred to me that madness and disease and dipsomania were often shields to protect the artist from the recognition of his own collapse. I couldn't reconcile myself to the thought that a man might dwindle as he grew older. I kept dreaming that old age should bring a flowering and not a withering. I kept feeling that the intensity and brilliance of youth should mellow into the serenity and grandeur of age, and to corroborate this notion I kept thinking of Wordsworth and Leonardo, of Verdi and Rembrandt, of Yeats and Michelangelo. I'd seen the frightening omens in certain of the poets that I knew and I was puzzled whether to ascribe them to the ravages of sex and alcohol, or to an innate weakness of character, or to some failure of the metabolism, or a distortion of vision, or an enfeebling of human sympathy.

Even in my own secret work, novels unfinished, poems uncrystallized, I detected this little demon of tainted talent and wilting power. I was horrified in the morning when I read certain passages which I had so passionately scribbled the night before. I had written too much and too impulsively and somnambulistically. I had allowed my brain to wander, my vision to flag, my feelings to vegetate, and I could recognize these lapses in a flattened prose and a dead vocabulary. The instant I recognized this I discarded the work ruthlessly. I had reached a point in my life for a frightening decision, whether to abandon altogether my passion for writing, or to struggle and keep struggling for an inner resuscitation, some heaven-sent renewal of style and feeling.

So here was de Chirico, an extreme example of what I feared. I left in dejection and walked to the door. I noticed a gray-haired man who was wandering through the hallway, eyes half-closed, reaching aimlessly into the air, like a sleepwalker.

I looked at him more closely. He opened his hangdog eyes and I detected a plea so desperate that I forced myself to say, "They are splendid! They are truly magnificent, signor!"

His lips started to tremble, his eyes grew blurred with tears. Then he pulled himself together with an air of bravado.

"Thank you kindly, my friend. I am touched. I am gratified. Certain small-minded critics have an insatiable grudge against me. Come, *caro,* we'll go to Quadri's and drink a small espresso."

There is nothing like the Piazza of St. Mark's to restore one's optimism. All the pangs and disillusionments, the worries and ennuis, the loves and hatreds, all are healed by the enveloping grandeur. We sat and sipped our coffee and the old unhappy painter looked suddenly rejuvenated, with his finger raised judiciously.

"They were wrong, abysmally wrong," he said with eyes like a bloodhound's, the lids drooping low and the nostrils raised imploringly. "Those fools called me a surrealist. But what does it mean to be a surrealist?" He stared at me intently and folded his hands as though in prayer.

"Maybe it means that a dream has its own super-reality, which floats high above our mundane reality?"

"We all share certain dreams," he said half-surreptitiously. "All men, of whatever age or whatever race, share certain dreams. The question is this—do we inherit these ancient dreams? Do we dive down at night into the swamps of prehistory?"

"Maybe we do," I said thoughtfully.

"Or are they the residues of history?"

"Perhaps," I said softly.

"Or are they the old phantasmal fears which we've learned to cast off in the hours of daylight? Some men are afraid of snakes or tarantulas. I have personally never been frightened by an adder or a spider. It's the hollowness of things and the rot and the isolation—it's *those* which have haunted me and inspired me in those paintings!"

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"You used to talk of metaphysical painting. What did you mean by that, signor?"

He suddenly perked up, as though stirred by a youthful memory. In the menacing brow, the eyes both guilty and challenging, I saw a youthful swagger, a sardonic air of triumph, and I remembered with a startling vividness that wonderful self-portrait, when the painter was still young, and still handsome and impassioned. Under that portrait he had printed the mystifying words, *"Et quid amabo nisi quod verum metaphysica est?"* Those hallucinatory words, when I read them years ago, had resounded in my ears like a call of a trumpet.

The painter placed his thumb on the side of the cup. "Metaphysical painting? Yes of course, I did believe in it. It meant a poetry which is calm in appearance but touched with a dark inquietude. There were times when I felt like an animal in a forest. I was still an admirer of Arnold Boecklin at this time. I used to study in Munich and I was the victim of German romanticism. I kept looking back to Dürer. I worshipped Dürer. I was haunted by him."

I felt that this weary old man wasn't really de Chirico. De Chirico was prowling in the distance, behind the shadowy columns. I felt saddened by those miserable paintings in the Libreria and I longed to call the painter back into the sunlight.

I said, "After all, Goya was sixty-six years old when he finished those terrifying *Desastros de la guerra.* And eight years later he was seventy-four and he did those black masterpieces on the banks of the Manzanares!"

De Chirico leaned forward. I could hear his bones creaking. A twitch of pain crossed his cheeks, followed by a spasm of relief. I felt a leap of hope. Maybe the greatness would well up again.

He growled, "Witches' sabbaths! A dog buried in the sand! A horse dangling from a gallows! Saturn devouring a child! This was the so-called 'Sleep of Reason'! He was decrepit and half-blind! They are the most macabre paintings in all of history! He was an atheist and there was no feeling of God in his universe. But his mind was still seething with enigmas and antitheses!"

He seemed exhausted. He leaned back and looked up at the sky. His head receded slowly, like that of a turtle into its shell.

"Youth, youth," he said sadly, with a ring of bewilderment. "Well, it's over. It was all just a juvenile phase. One must move forever onward. I keep thinking of Tintoretto. After all, even old age can hold wondrous and thrilling vistas . . ."

His voice rippled away across the stones like dying footsteps. He sat in the sloping light, ennobled, like a ruin, by the shadows that were crawling across the Piazza.

Voices of Silence

One evening I was invited to meet a very famous Frenchman, and after the drinks down in the Village we both got into a taxi and we headed up Fifth Avenue in the pouring rain.

The streets looked long and dangerous, like infinite vestibules, and the lamps in the rain sparkled like a long row of fangs. The raincoats and umbrellas crawled through the gloom like beasts of prey.

"I have never seen Harlem," said Malraux rather absently. "Would you take me to Harlem? I would love to see Harlem. By the way, about Gide—there was a disconcerting thing, a shadowy reproachfulness, even a glaze of asperity. As though he couldn't forgive you for being a heterosexual."

"And Cocteau?" I said.

"There was always a gleam of irony in him. As though he secretly suspected you of *not* being heterosexual."

We arrived at the Savoy Ballroom. It was noisy and crowded but after a sweeping glance he relaxed in his chair. The beautiful young black women and men swept past him, exuding a scent of cloves, sex, chewing gum, and sweat.

"Of course," he said calmly, "there is that accent of the jungle but it is all very Americanized, very ruthless and mechanical. I once saw Cocteau chatting with Claudel in

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the Louvre and I noticed that ironical gleam of suspicion. It was rather diminishing to poor old Claudel. Gide could also be diminishing with his glaze of asperity, but it was a different diminution. Less sarcastic, less humiliating."

Malraux had come to New York to visit his editors at Doubleday, who were about to publish *The Voices of Silence.* This was projected as the greatest of the works of Malraux, combining the breadth of his erudition with the power of his insight and the electrical vitality of his quicksilver intelligence.

The three most intelligent men I have met in my life were George Santayana, Thomas Mann, and André Malraux. There are many kinds of intelligence. There is an intuitive intelligence like Auden's, which was dissipated when he started to distrust his intuition. There is a symbol-haunted intelligence, like that of Edgar Wind, which was at ease only in the symbol-haunted world of the Renaissance. There was the sorcery-like wisdom of the Baroness Blixen and the sibyl-like muttering of Gertrude Stein and Marguerite Yourcenar. There was the generalized brilliance of Isaiah Berlin and the playful pedagogical brilliance of Maurice Bowra. I had seen literary eminence linked with pretense and pomposity, but in Mann and Santayana and Malraux there was none whatever. Under Santayana's gloom and Malraux's agitation and the meditative didacticism of Thomas Mann there was always the search for a cool, impersonal truth, which was closely linked to an acceptance of the impossibility of seizing the truth. I was deeply impressed by a literary grandeur like Gide's or Eliot's, but what moved me even more was the half-despairing search for truth, which I sensed in the groping little pauses of Thomas Mann, in the headlong onrush of André Malraux's verbosity, and in the reverent silences of George Santayana.

I suffer from a malady which is called "total recall." I remember every visual and olfactory detail of an encounter, and the vocal intonations still keep ringing in my ears. But even worse, I hear the silences, the inaudible reverberations. I still can hear the sorrowing silences of George Santayana, the haunted little pauses of Thomas Mann, and the feverish gaps in André Malraux's verbosity.

"Yes. Gide," said Malraux. "What is one to say about Gide? *De mortuis* and so on. But still, he was a terrible influence. So bleak, so antiseptical, in short, so corrupting. A whole generation was corrupted by the example of Gide. I am not thinking of the pederasty, that is a thing of no significance. I am thinking of the purism, that vile and deadly asceticism."

The pink satin dresses had an air of joyful savagery against the coiling black hair and the velvety brown skins. The music grew distant and throbbing and hallucinatory, and Malraux clasped his hands under his chin with a look of anguish.

"Music should try to say *nothing,* or rather it shouldn't try to say *anything,* or rather it should be oblivious of all desire to say anything. It begins where words end but in a sense so does poetry, which trembles and sways above its scaffolding of words. It transfigures the words in the very act of using the words, just as a sculptor transfigures the marble as he hacks at the marble. And after a while the words are nothing, they are merely flotsam and jetsam and only the poetry itself remains, composed of words but freed from words." (As he spoke I suddenly grasped the real achievement of Eliot. I suddenly sensed the meaning under the great *Four Quartets.*)

"Think," he said, "of Botticelli. In Botticelli all is dreams, but the dreams are more than dreams and at the same time less than dreams. They keep hovering in the interstices of myths, legends, minotaurs. The Botticellian faces are frozen in a trance-like terror which is both exquisite and devastating. The forest turns into a blending of the Paradiso and the Inferno. Botticelli has woven his art out of an exaltation of dreams and at the same time, you might call it the woof to the golden web, out of a subjugation of dreams and even a degradation of dreams, since putting the paint on canvas,

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just like putting the pen on paper, inevitably involves a subjugation and a degradation. Which isn't to say that Botticelli is not sublime. It is merely to say that the greatest masterpieces of all are those which were never born, which existed only in their pristine world of dreams and were never degraded and subjugated into actuality."

I felt a passionate desire to pierce into the mystery of Malraux. Even now, years after I had read it, I was haunted by *La Condition Humaine,* which was both lucid and occult, like the inscription on a tomb. I muttered absent-mindedly, "And what about Goya?" (I had recently read his wonderful essay about Goya.)

"Yes, Goya," he said quickly. "But please remember that the Caprichos are caricatures produced at a time when he was severed from the world by sickness. He psychoanalyzed himself in these macabre little visions. They were his own inner hell laden with cats and hyenas, corpse-like horsemen and decaying duchesses. Goya was drawn to the chaotic and not to the architectonic. He loved the threat of chiaroscuro more than the clarity of color. He was obsessed at this time by a maddening need to protest, and you might call him the great Western interpreter of human agony. He destroyed the majestical symmetry of the Renaissance and he opened the gates to the flood of modern art."

He stared at the illumined dancers and cocked his head at the music.

"Consider Dante, on the other hand. In Dante the words are nothing and the vision is everything. And still, by that marvelous paradox which galvanizes art, the vision fades into the distance as the words flash into magnificence, and in the end the words are everything and the vision itself is nothing."

He leaned fiercely over the table.

"Do you see?"

"Yes, I see!"

Malraux's cheeks were deeply furrowed and his eyes were dark and bloodshot, as though behind that intelligence there lurked a mighty sorrow, a grief which was deeper than thoughts or intuitions. When he spoke he gave to his words a certain ring of desperation and his lips were alive with a perpetual tension. I felt infected by this tension and this desperation, which by their very impersonality had a contagious sort of magnetism.

He glanced at me sideways with his razor-sharp eyes, and his voice grew more mellow, indulgent, conciliatory.

"Music, of course, is a special thing. It moves in time, unlike a painting. A poem also moves in time but a poem can be stabilized. It can be turned by the reader into a painting or a cathedral. Thus music is very vulnerable and at the same time invulnerable. All art, of course, is vulnerable and suffers from the onrush of time, but the onrush of time renders it finally invulnerable. Art flows on the waves of time beyond the reach of understanding and eventually it is with a strange new mystery. The song is muted but reverberant, the fresco is chipped and faded, the marble is pock-marked but it has a strange new dignity. The poems of Archilochus are only tiny, but they shine with a strange and frightening vitality."

As we sat there I felt more and more remote from Malraux, as though some uncontrollable tide were carrying his voice into the shadows. He was a dusky and tortuous and spectacular sort of man but his spirit was alien and fleshless and impenetrable.

In the thin yellow light which burrowed through the ballroom the hands of André Malraux were brilliantly visible. They lay on the table, pressed together, like the shells of an oyster. They, too, like his face, were lost in a tortured meditation. They lay motionless and lost, shining on a wave-haunted beach, and his voice hung in the air like the call of a seabird.

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The "complete" Elizabeth Bishop

by Brad Leithauser

Elizabeth Bishop was one of those rare poets whose work draws a fair percentage of readers into a cultish devotion. These were readers for whom the appearance of each new poem—and in the last decade of her life, until her death in 1979, her poems arrived at the rate of about one a year—was a looked for, happy event. A sharp-eyed observer, with a voice distinctive to the point of quirkiness, she amassed a range of work unmistakably her own; and perhaps some of that work's appeal derives from the way its quirkiness can instill in the reader a sense of being among the few who *really* understand what the woman was up to. This feeling of exclusive, privileged knowledge may easily lead to an ugly clubbism at odds with literature's egalitarian spirit, but ideally it can offer the reader a treasured gratification: the sense of having established, in that purified preserve where only words exist, a special and an irreplaceable friend.

So singular a poet might be expected to have occupied an unusual niche in contemporary American poetry, and indeed she did, in two ways. In an embittered and often blinkered literary world, she managed to lure admirers from every school. Formalists, Beats, Iowans, New Yorkers, recounters of drug voyages and chroniclers of sexual triumphs, the happily impenetrable and the embarrassingly transparent—all contributed their share of fans. At times the breadth of her appeal may seem almost suspect, and to explain her lack of detractors one might cynically note her having spent so much time far from the various American literary battlegrounds (her travels included nearly two decades in Brazil), or her having essentially restricted her occasional critical prose to commendation, but one must finally come away with an exhilarating conviction that here is that uncommon thing: a display of sound collective critical judgment.

Her niche was unusual, too, in that it seemed to straddle two schools, the formal and the colloquial. A similar blending could be found in some of her contemporaries, notably Roethke and Lowell, who started as quite strict formalists and eased in mid-career into looser forms and rhythms. But in Bishop's work the two voices coexisted reposefully from the beginning to the end of her career. She was an absolute master of poetic technique; her collected poetry, newly and exhaustively issued this month as *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979*,[1] is such a rich depository of poetic tricks that the somewhat fanciful latinate term for a handbook on prosody, gradus (literally *step*—the first step up Parnassus), might legitimately be applied. Certainly a young poet in search of models could find no finer, more concentrated exhibition of contemporary poetic effects. Like Frost, she managed her formal devices while maintaining a relaxed and often conversational tone. So subtle are many of these that the reader who is indif-

1 Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 276 pages, $17.50

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ferent to poetic technique, or even hostile to it, can enjoy her work without having his concentration jarred by artifice. This seamless combination of the casual and the formal is what enviably allows her to be both a "popular poet" (her books sell as well as any poet's can be expected to) and a "poet's poet."

Fittingly in a writer of such exquisite prosodic effects, her emotions are delicately calibrated throughout. She moves by hint and implication. This emotional restraint, which is the aspect of her work most commented upon, was aptly characterized by the Mexican poet Octavio Paz (whose work she translated) as "the power of reticence." She was a plucky soul who guarded her own privacy and spoke with obliquity when confronting suffering, disappointment, loss. In an era in which "confessional verse" carried poetic divulgence to worrisome new depths, in which the printed page served as an alternate (or an additional) analyst's couch, her poetry stood as a beloved exemplar of the controlled and self-contained.

An early poem like "The Bight" illustrates this interlacing of emotional and prosodic understatement. One is tipped off early, with the queer phrase "On my birthday" lying just below the title, that the scene to be described may have an inner counterpart, but the analogy remains unspecified for most of the poem. Near the close, she compares some storm-damaged boats to "torn-open, unanswered letters," and at this point the bight, with its clicking dredge at the end of the dock and its "impalpable drafts," might be seen as a desk-top or poet's studio, the place where creative work gets done. Here is the finish:

> The bight is littered with old correspondences.
> Click. Click. Goes the dredge,
> and brings up a dripping jawful of marl.
> All the untidy activity continues,
> awful but cheerful.

These "correspondences" are of course a pun—both those "unanswered letters" and the larger correspondences between natural and psychological objects. The "dripping jawful of marl" provides a correspondence of this latter sort; one might view the jumbled, rich vegetal and mineral matter, scooped from the depths, as the soil for verse. Subtle as such emotional effects are, though, the prosodic effects here are still subtler. Miss Bishop has buried that rhyme of "jawful" and "awful" until it's only liminally visible and audible. Any poet who has worked with and loves rhyme—as she did throughout her life—knows that an internal rhyme is apt to seem a "wasted" rhyme; that a good rhyme, like a good new pair of shoes, is meant partly for display. Yet the careful reader of her verse will be struck by how often she conceals her musical effects (though when appropriate she could be quite brazen, even clangorous, in her rhymes, as in "Roosters"). Actually, the close of "The Bight" turns on a trio of rhyme and off-rhyme: "jawful"/"awful"/"cheerful." That final "cheerful" dips the conclusion away from neat exact rhyme, while its "ch" sound echoes the earlier chewy feel of "jawful."

Or examine the ending (she was especially adept at endings) of an even earlier poem, "Large Bad Picture," one of many she set in quatrains:

> In the pink light
> the small red sun goes rolling, rolling,
> round and round and round at the same height
> in perpetual sunset, comprehensive, consoling,
>
> while the ships consider it.
> Apparently they have reached their destination.
> It would be hard to say what brought them
> there,
> commerce or contemplation.

Characteristic Bishop touches abound here: simplicity in the unadorned colloquial repetition of "round and round and round"; hesitancy in both "Apparently" and "It would be hard to say"; variety in the staggered line-lengths and the blend of monosyllables and polysyllables; as well as a passion (to be discussed later) for the color pink. Perhaps the

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most finely drawn detail is the way the first syllables of the penultimate stanza's concluding pair of words, "*com*prehensive, *con*soling," mirror the first syllables of the poem's concluding pair, "*com*merce or *con*templation." A similar effect is found at the close of "Filling Station":

> Somebody
> arranges the rows of cans
> so that they softly say:
> ESSO—SO—SO—SO
> to high-strung automobiles.
> Somebody loves us all.

Here the cans of oil are arranged like cue cards to prompt that concluding sentence, the "SO—SO—SO" grading toward that "*So*mebody loves us all." (Neatly, the message in the oil cans is reinforced by both the "*so*" and "*so*ftly" in the fourth line from the end.)

With another poet, one would be tempted to ascribe such coincidences to chance—and surely one must be wary when trafficking in such delicacies, for nothing is more risible than a critic's uprooting from a text ingenuities an author never consciously or unconsciously directed. But in Miss Bishop's work there seems little likelihood that such elegant flourishes, often coming at the close, are unintentional. She was extraordinarily meticulous. Her work provides the critic with a wonderfully heartening impression that what's there is what's meant to be there —that every word and rhyme and effect has been mulled over and is deliberate.

Of course such deliberateness has its dangers (the step from the calculated to the enervated is a short one), and these she avoids in many ways, but perhaps most distinctively with what might be termed a correcting vision. She is constantly, within the poem, altering details—sharpening observations. The reader is right there at the moment of perception, the intensifying instant when the clearly seen grows yet clearer. Spontaneity and freshness naturally result. Often these corrections are accomplished with a flat negative, a *no* announcing that the eye has been tricked or indolent and the fastidious poet must try once more. For example: "Are they birds?/ They flash again. No. They are vibrations" ("From the Country to the City"); "It is of wood/ built somewhat like a box. No. Built/ like several boxes" ("The Monument"); "She sits and watches TV./ No, she watches zigzags" ("House Guest"); "inverted and distorted. No. I mean/ distorted and revealed" ("Love Lies Sleeping").

Sometimes these corrections are tendered indirectly (often parenthetically), with an offhand or outflung query or qualification: "Shadows, or are they shallows" ("The Map"); "I wandered—rather, I floundered" ("From Trollope's Journal"); "my body—foot, that is" ("Giant Snail"); "faint, faint, faint/ (or are you hearing things), the sandpipers'/ heart-broken cries" ("Twelfth Morning"); "And it's still loved,/ or its memory is (it must have changed a lot)" ("Poem").

This process of correction on the page proves an aesthetically risky business. It's as though the poet has chosen to display both the initial and the finished draft of a line. To be artistically worthwhile, the correction must be interesting in each of its halves, as in these lines from "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto":

> Here comes some laundry tied up in a sheet,
> all on its own, three feet above the ground.
> Oh, no—a small black boy is underneath.

A bundle of laundry moving on its own propulsion is far more than interesting—it's miraculous—but the correction, the miracle explained, has its own appeals, for the reader immediately likes and empathizes with this toiling Brazilian boy, trudging in the heat toward a drink of water. At times, as in "Santarém," one of her last poems, this process can seem needlessly finicky (illustrating how for the poet, as for the stand-up comedian, a passionate concern for detail can be deadening), but generally she wields this device with telling success.

Miss Bishop's success stems in part from

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an ability to mock her own fussiness, as in lines like these: "The great light cage has broken up in the air,/freeing, I think, about a million birds . . . ." That "I think" may seem a typical Bishop reservation, a caveat to the reader that the poet's powers are limited, yet when immediately trailed by that enormous, hyperbolic "million" it becomes a little joke. A similar thing is probably occurring in this description of fireflies from "A Cold Spring": "lit on the ascending flight,/drifting simultaneously to the same height,/—exactly like the bubbles in champagne." This "exactly," lodged in a poem replete with hesitations (words like "seem" and "apparently"), appears to be a stroke of levity masquerading as boldness.

In its fitting rightness, this precision of Bishop's can actually obscure the strangeness of her language and imagery. One reads right past the strangeness, only on a later return appreciating how queer it is to encounter, say, a lighthouse "in black and white clerical dress,/who lives on his nerves," or an "insect-gladiator" under the wallpaper, or "shopworn dunes" or the "mildew's/ignorant map" or a "folded sunset, still quite warm." Where else might one discover a taxi meter that "glares like a moral owl"? (It is unfortunate that for later generations of readers, for whom taxi meters presumably will not be those old-fashioned, imposing, bulky presences that click like a censorious tongue, but compact, rectilinear objects with faces like computer screens, this image may lose some of its potency.) Or where else might one meet—in a delicately rhymed poem that lapses from exact rhyme only in its last line—"the armored cars of dreams," those metal tanks that follow trails of crumbs as in the Hansel and Gretel story?

This precise and decorous and exquisite poet was also a habitual rule-breaker. The pathetic fallacy thrives in her verse ("self-pitying mountains," a "desperate" sea), as do all those adverbs a student in any elementary writing class is advised to treat sparingly ("slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,/icily free above the stones" or "grandly, silently flowing, flowing east. Suddenly there'd been houses"). Like Marianne Moore, an early and a lasting influence, she seemed to distrust the perfectly scrubbed and symmetrical; her patterns were made to be rumpled. Time and again rhyme schemes break down, often in the last stanza—or in the penultimate stanza, with the last stanza restoring order. Her rhythms trip, somewhat like Hardy's, and her often iambic lines are further roughened by piled-up monosyllables and generous scatterings of punctuation. With a poet like Auden, whom she admired, one can often read a pentameter line and come up a little astonished that ten full syllables have been so frictionlessly traversed; in Bishop's poems, one never experiences this particular surprise.

Modest and bold, delicate and roughhewn, formal and colloquial—this nonpareil paradox of a poet somehow contrived to bring a number of poetic forms to near-perfection. Surely no American has composed more memorable sestinas than her "A Miracle for Breakfast" and "Sestina," or a finer ballad than her "The Burglar of Babylon." Her two twenty-eight-line double sonnets, "The Prodigal" and "From Trollope's Journal," succeed in sowing new and salubrious fruit from the fields of that much-tilled form, and as for her villanelle, "One Art," a critic would have to invoke Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night" or Roethke's "The Waking" to place it among peers.

If one may be excused for speaking personally of so magnificently impersonal a poet, I've never been quite content with some of Miss Bishop's last poems—or perhaps with the response they received. I'm thinking particularly of a poem like "In the Waiting Room," or even more of "Five Flights Up," with its admission of suffering at the close:

> —Yesterday brought to today so lightly!
> (A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)

Both appeared in *Geography III*, the last collection published in her lifetime. In the criti-

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cal reception to that book there was, it seemed to me, a bit of affectionate but unappealingly titillative pleasure in seeing her composure relent, in watching her join the ranks of the self-confessedly wounded. Of course, these "confessions" of hers were scarcely raw, untutored cries from the heart (they were in fact reserved and masterful declarations), but I preferred that she keep her distance nonetheless. The sympathetic reader knew all along that she was someone who had endured crushing hardship, who had, in Robert Lowell's words, "risen from the ocean's bottom." Only such a person could have generated the brutalized atmosphere of the first stanza of "The Prodigal," my favorite of her poems—that farmhand's world of rot, dung, hangovers, the gruesome, robust cheerfulness of animals that eat their young, intimations of madness, and a hovering, numinous beauty that induces as much painful longing as solace.

> The brown enormous odor he lived by
> was too close, with its breathing and thick hair,
> for him to judge. The floor was rotten; the sty
> was plastered halfway up with glass-smooth
> dung.
> Light-lashed, self-righteous, above moving
> snouts,
> the pigs' eyes followed him, a cheerful stare—
> even to the sow that always ate her young—
> till, sickening, he leaned to scratch her head.
> But sometimes mornings after drinking bouts
> (he hid the pints behind a two-by-four),
> the sunrise glazed the barnyard mud with red;
> the burning puddles seemed to reassure.
> And then he thought he almost might endure
> his exile yet another year or more.

She certainly kept an admirable distance as a teacher at Harvard in the early 1970s. When I first met Elizabeth Bishop, briefly, in 1971, I expressed my surprise at finding her teaching a writing seminar, or teaching at all, since I thought she was dead—a misconception that amused her enough that she repeated it to others over the years. (My mistake still seems to me a natural one; surely the careless step was for a woman still in her fifties to publish a book entitled *The Complete Poems,* which she did in 1969. Over the next decade, she completed more than a dozen new poems, each one happily rendering that title more and more inaccurate.) In 1973 and 1974, when I attended two of her seminars, she used to sit with great equanimity through student poems about misunderstanding parents, teenage sexual frustration, and abusive roommates, as well as an awesome number about the peculiar spiritual burden of being young and bright and affluent. (Perhaps as an antidote for this group of young poets afflicted with non-problem problems, she assigned—the only reading assignment she made—*Hope Against Hope,* that harrowing account of Osip Mandelstam's persecution and eventual murder by the Soviets.) She fended off our more alarming submissions with a string of primly schoolmarmish exclamations—"Goodness" and "My" and "Oh dear" and "Heavens"—and with a readiness (often frustrating to the student author) to turn to those small matters of composition (spelling, punctuation) that we in our creative urgency were grandly indifferent to. She retreated also behind a formality with names, not merely addressing her students as "Mister" or "Miss" but often extending this practice to dead authors. F. Scott Fitzgerald (whose description, in *The Great Gatsby,* of the wasteland surveyed by Dr. T. J. Eckleburg's billboard we studied for a number of weeks, partly because Miss Bishop was fond of it and partly because she wasn't terribly inventive in formulating assignments) was inevitably "Mister Fitzgerald." This "Mister" was not granted to writers like Tennyson or Blake or Pope, however, and I finally concluded that she instinctively felt that anyone who'd been alive in her own lifetime, and whom she might conceivably have met, retained forever the right to this courtesy.

So convincingly rendered was this role of schoolmarm—at least to a young man of twenty—that I cringed for her in class one day when she began reading random selections from Philip Larkin's new *High Win-*

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dows and settled upon "This Be The Verse." I thought she'd made a mortifying mistake, and expected her face to crimson with those first few lines:

> They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
> They may not mean to, but they do.

Of course her face did no such thing. One gradually sensed a steeliness in that mildest of teachers and occasionally (as when, in response to her request that we each bring in the worst poem we'd ever read, one young woman submitted Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats") enormous exasperation and weariness. She didn't seem to care much for teaching poetry.

Listening to recordings she made of her poems in the Forties and Fifties, I encountered a clear, musical voice I'd never heard before—scarcely recognizable as my teacher's. By the time I met her, she was a frail woman with a big cough. A heavy smoker of mashed-looking French cigarettes, and apparently careless of her health in other ways as well, she was often taken ill. In the last decade of her life, most of it spent in Boston, she wrote little although she produced a few of her best poems. How small her output actually was is made painfully clear in the compact format of *Collected Poems: 1927-1979,* in which *Geography III* (1976) fits without strain into twenty-five pages.

She published four poems after *Geography III,* of which two, "Sonnet" and "Pink Dog," belong with her best work. On first meeting "Pink Dog" in *The New Yorker,* I remember thinking, with some astonishment, that Miss Bishop had abandoned a lifelong practice and had begun capitalizing the first word of each line. In fact she hadn't, but mine seems an instructive mistake. The first eight lines *are* capitalized, for each begins a new sentence. We have here a paradigmatic display of Bishop the pattern-maker and -breaker. These opening stanzas, with their short sentences and end-stopped lines, their singsong iambic pentameter rhythms and exact rhymes, establish a regularity that will later be upended:

> The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.
> Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
> Naked, you trot across the avenue.
>
> Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
> Naked and pink, without a single hair . . .
> Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.
>
> Of course they're mortally afraid of rabies.
> You are not mad; you have a case of scabies
> but look intelligent. Where are your babies?

The pattern-breaker emerges further down the page:

> In your condition you would not be able
> even to float, much less to dog-paddle.
> Now look, the practical, the sensible
>
> solution is to wear a *fantasia.*
> Tonight you simply can't afford to be a-
> n eyesore. But no one will ever see a
>
> dog in *máscara* this time of year.

This poem also represents the apotheosis of Miss Bishop's fascination with the color pink, a shade of both beauty and dread in her work. One thinks of the melting "pink wax roses planted in tin cans" that mark a deaf woman's servant's grave in "Cootchie," the "pink swim-bladder / like a big peony" of "The Fish," the trees "like noble pantomimists, robed in pink" in "Questions of Travel," the ominous "one pink flash" of "Electrical Storm," the owls "stained bright pink underneath" by raging fire in "The Armadillo," and "the windshield flashing pink, / pink glancing off of metal" in "The Moose." In "Pink Dog" the color vibrates with garish ferocity, evoking both the joyous festivity of Mardi Gras and the horror of this diseased dog, a soul mate to all those ill and impoverished of Rio's slums ("idiots, paralytics, parasites") who have nothing to celebrate at Carnival Time.

The Complete Poems: 1927-1979 also makes available for the first time a number of poems written in youth and a few others

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Miss Bishop over the years decided not to publish. Unfortunately, most are not important additions to her work, although "Exchanging Hats" (which she probably chose not to publish because of its teasing subject matter—ambiguity in sexual roles) boasts a daffy playfulness not found elsewhere. I would not have expected to find anywhere in her work a line like "what might a miter matter?"

These previously unpublished poems do help us to clarify influences (especially her early debt to Hopkins) and to trace the lineaments of her poetic development—which, as one might expect, shifted by subtle degrees. One cannot cleanly break her work into stylistic eras, as one can with, say, Lowell or Auden. Still it is undeniable that as time went on her work became ever clearer and more accessible. An acceptable paraphrase for nearly every line in *Geography III* could easily be constructed, though lines like these could not be rendered more simply but only more prosaically:

> Goodbye to the elms,
> to the farm, to the dog.
> The bus starts. The light
> grows richer; the fog,
> shifting, salty, thin,
> comes closing in.

She also became increasingly fond of what might be called "using the whole instrument," in this case her typewriter; there's scarcely anything on the keyboard—asterisks, virgules, numbers, exclamation points, dashes, ampersands—which she didn't employ by the time she was through.

A "complete poems" should be held to more stringent tests than would be fair for an intermediate volume, and I wish I could say I'm absolutely satisfied with this book's format. The poems tend to look just a trifle cramped and the new type creates titles that look a bit beetlingly large given the unassuming master we are dealing with here. (It should in fairness be said that the book's typography and format were created by Cynthia Krupat, whose designs, according to a publisher's note, "always delighted Elizabeth"—no small task with a writer as finicky and knowledgeable about type and layout as she was.) Such cavils are obviously tiny, however, and should not be allowed to obscure the loving, exemplary job that Farrar, Straus & Giroux has done and continues to do with Elizabeth Bishop's poetry. What we have with *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979* is not only an indispensable volume, but in most ways a comely one.

Randall Jarrell, that extraordinary critic who so often managed to combine boldness with prescience, in 1954 remarked of *A Cold Spring,* her second collection, that it was "one of the best books of poetry an American has written." Use of the term "best" should probably be avoided in judging things as varied as various poets' collections, and yet it does seem evident to me that of the verse written by that hugely accomplished generation of American poets born in the 1910s—a group that included Lowell, Berryman, and Jarrell himself—hers is the most surprising, the most nearly perfect, at once the most eccentric and most true; that she asks the fewest indulgences of her readers and is consistently the least annoying (no small virtue, that); and finally that she remains the poet whose work on a second reading—or a fifth, or a tenth—is most likely to reveal some hitherto undiscovered loveliness. But perhaps I've not avoided that word "best" after all.

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John Berger and photography

by Andy Grundberg

John Berger, the English Marxist critic who has written about painting and sculpture since the Fifties, has of late enlarged his purview to include photography. To a large extent, his growing interest in the medium is a consequence of his political stance toward art in general—a position spelled out in *Ways of Seeing,* his most influential work to date.

Ways of Seeing is devoted to establishing a connection between the European tradition of oil painting and capitalism. "Oil painting did to appearances what capital did to social relations," Berger argues. "Oil painting celebrated a new kind of wealth—which was dynamic and which found its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money." He contends that oil paintings between 1500 and 1900 are in large part concerned with depicting things (i.e., property), that the medium of oil is especially suited for conveying the substance of such things, and that paintings of property have themselves come to be treated as property.

The argument of *Ways of Seeing* presents a contradiction to anyone who is both a Marxist and an art critic—both an opponent of Western society as it now exists and a proponent of aesthetic experience. As his writings show, Berger clearly loves painting (and, less intensely, sculpture); he has praised the oils of Hals, La Tour, Turner, Courbet—even Matisse. How can a critic who despises capitalism, as Berger does, praise the products that capitalism fosters and promotes? Either one can attempt to salvage painting by allowing for certain exceptions (as indeed Berger does; for example, in *Ways of Seeing* and in *The Success and Failure of Picasso* he claims for Cubist painting a revolutionary function), or one can turn elsewhere, to other, more "advanced," visual art forms. One of these—one which has held the attention of cultural critics of the Left since Walter Benjamin—is photography.

Berger's first chapter in *Ways of Seeing* is virtually a paraphrase of Benjamin's seminal 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which places photography in the vanguard of twentieth-century art because it is a reproducible medium. According to Benjamin, photographs dispel the "aura" and "cult value" of art (e.g., oil painting) by virtue of their multiplicity, and of the ease with which they can be mechanically reproduced. It is, as Benjamin describes it, a medium in which function is more meaningful than delectation. Holding Benjamin in high regard, Berger might be expected to hold photography in some regard as well—despite his continued affection for oil painting. While *Ways of Seeing* does not address photography directly, Berger has shown an interest in the medium for more than a decade. He has experimented with the photo/text form with photographer Jean Mohr (*A Fortunate Man,* 1967; *A Seventh Man,* 1972); more recently, in *About Looking* (1980), he addressed

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specific photographs and photographic ideas in his criticism.

Another Way of Telling,[1] however, is Berger's first full-scale consideration of photography. It is, in some respects, a companion volume to *Ways of Seeing,* and is at least as theoretical in approach, didactic in tone, and exasperating to read as that book. *Another Way of Telling* also is unconventional in form. It consists of five parts: a photo/text section by Mohr about his experiences as a photojournalist; a theoretical essay by Berger; an extended picture essay that runs 140 pages without a word of text; another (shorter) essay by Berger; and finally a Berger poem paired with a Mohr portrait. Of these, the second, an essay called "Appearances," is the most central and challenging, for it contains the essentials of Berger's view of photography.

In *Ways of Seeing* Berger says that all images exist in relation to time: "Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented . . . . An image became a record of how X had seen Y." The distance in time between the making of the image and its apprehension by a viewer becomes, in *Another Way of Telling,* a fundamental characteristic of the photograph: "All photographs are of the past, yet in them an instant of the past is arrested so that, unlike a lived past, it can never lead to the present," he says, adding, "Between the moment recorded and the present moment of looking at the photograph, there is an abyss." The point has common sense on its side, although Berger has already identified the abyss as characteristic of all images, not just photographs.

This abyss, Berger contends, makes all photographs ambiguous; they "quote" from appearances (here he views camera images as "natural" rather than culturally determined), but in doing so they isolate them from their "meanings." Berger himself quotes the well-known observation of Roland Barthes, that photographs are "messages without a code." But because they are *traces* of the world (per Benjamin, Barthes, Susan Sontag, et al.), and thus have a special relation to time—the photograph contains "the isolated instant of what it shows"—photographs nevertheless have the *potential* for meaning. Berger locates this potential in the "half-language" of appearances, which he says lack the grammar of a true semiotic system but still "cohere" through the agencies of memory and the imagination (through, in short, the viewer, whose responses are in part culturally determined—here his argument begins to eat its tail). Because appearances cohere, Berger argues, photographs can lead to ideas. And more:

> Apart from the event photographed, apart from the lucidity of the idea, we are moved by the photograph's fulfillment of an expectation which is intrinsic to the will to look. The camera completes the half-language of appearances and articulates an unmistakable meaning. When this happens we suddenly find ourselves at home amongst appearances, as we are at home in our mother tongue.

Much of the rest of *Another Way of Telling* can be seen as evidence for this central and problematic thesis. The photo essay on peasant life—in format much like the collage chapters of *Ways of Seeing* that use long sequences of related images in lieu of words—is an attempt to build meaning from the accretion of details, each "detail" being in this case an entire photograph. The essay that follows this section is an explanation of, or apologia for, its method. Mohr's contribution in the book's first part is anecdotal but serves to confirm Berger's idea that photographs are ambiguous (different persons looking at Mohr's photographs are shown to see different things, to no one's surprise). The final section consists of a conventional portrait of a peasant and a mawkish poem apparently occasioned by it ("Declining he farts/ lights the fire goes out/ with his churn/ 5:30 am.").

1 Pantheon, 372 pages, $17.50 and $9.95 (paperback)

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But, being a Marxist, Berger is not entirely content with the ontological; he also seeks to show how photographs function, to distinguish their various operations and applications, and to position them dialectically. These observations are so intertwined with his thesis about appearances that they easily could pass unnoticed, but they constitute a subtext that warrants some investigation.

Besides giving photographs status as traces, Berger gives them a truth function: they quote from appearances rather than translate them, and thus cannot lie unless manipulated or interfered with. (Again, he ignores the genesis of the medium's notational system—that it was invented, not discovered.) But, Berger adds, because of this they are used to add authenticity to "consumerist lies" (presumably here he is referring to advertising photographs, which encourage consumption). Truth in a photograph, he concludes, depends on how it is used and who is using it. He identifies three public uses: scientific investigation, systems of social and political control, and communications. In none, he says, is the "utter truth" found.

He goes on to distinguish another type of photograph, whose function he explores at length because to him it represents the medium at its most radical. It is, surprisingly enough, the "expressive photograph," and he employs several of André Kertész's World War I era Hungarian photographs as examples of what he means. (Berger has a history of liking the right things for wrong-headed reasons, vide *The Success and Failure of Picasso.*) Expressive photographs, he says, quote from appearances *at length,* and thus engage other events, ideas, and meanings in the viewer via the mechanism of memory. In doing so, he asserts, they can confound history.

Berger sees Kertész's photograph "A Red Hussar Leaving, June 1919, Budapest" as embodying a conflict between time and timelessness. The historical and public—the revolutionary moment in Hungary's past—contends with the eternal and yet private emotions Berger sees in the expressions and gestures of the figures in the picture. From this perception he formulates a peculiar position: that "any photograph . . . can be used in order to break the monopoly which history today has over time," to recover a sense of the timeless that Berger says modern life has otherwise taken from us. What he finally seems to say—although I doubt he means to—is that any photograph can be an "expressive" photograph, depending on who is looking at it. We are left with no tools for judging photographs other than our subjective responses.

What, in the final analysis, does Berger tell us about photography? In his preface to *Another Way of Telling* he writes: "Everyone in the world is now familiar with photographs and cameras. And yet what is a photograph? What do photographs mean? How can they be used? Such questions which began to be asked with the invention of the camera have not, until now, been fully answered." (The immodesty, the hubris of that "until now" is, unfortunately, characteristic of Berger.) But one would have to stretch the point to say that in *Another Way of Telling,* either in the fifty pages of the essay "Appearances," or in the three hundred pages of the entire book, or indeed anywhere else in Berger's writings, these questions are answered. Instead, Berger gives us a pastiche of already promulgated ideas from Sontag (the notion of the trace, of appearances), Barthes (the "messages without a code," the "having been there" of the photograph), and, most of all, through them as well as directly, Walter Benjamin. Since today we are as Benjamin-saturated as we are image-saturated, Berger's contribution to photographic ontology can seem rather slim to anyone already conversant with photography theory.

Indeed, we are heavily over-ontologized as it is; who of late has *not* attempted to define the unique and essential qualities of the photograph? While some of this discourse has stimulated new ideas and new critical approaches to the medium, in gen-

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eral it tends to ignore the existence of a substantial photographic tradition and history of practice. Moreover, it now seems regressive to continue to stress the medium's separateness from other visual media. Today photography is in a period of interchange and synthesis, and the most interesting work being done on its behalf—the writings of art critics such as Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp, the exhibitions prepared by young art historians such as Peter Galassi, John Pultz, and Catherine Scallen, the pictures of artists such as Robert Adams, Robert Cumming and Cindy Sherman—makes connections, not distinctions. Berger's choice of an ontological approach is especially curious when one considers that *Ways of Seeing* consisted of an historical, and ultimately political, reading of the tradition and function of painting. In *Another Way of Telling* photography's history, in the sense of its tradition *and* its social functioning in the last century and a half, is totally ignored.

Despite his ready recourse to Marxist ideology, Berger's strong suit has always been practical criticism, not theory—as Peter Fuller, yet another English Marxist art critic, points out in *Seeing Berger,* a critique of *Ways of Seeing.* When he concentrates on specific pictures—Kertész's "Red Hussar" in *Another Way of Telling,* August Sander's portrait of three peasant boys and Paul Strand's portrait of a New England farmer in *About Looking*—his analyses can be intriguing in spite of his political intention as frequently as because of it. (In Sander's photograph, for example, he sees the tailored suits that the peasants are wearing as an indication of the imposition of urban values on the agricultural class; the observation directs our attention to the incongruity of costume and character in the picture.) When writing about paintings, significantly, Berger often reads them as if they were photographs. His analyses are largely confined to the subjects of the paintings, their gestures, looks, costumes and relations to the painter; the tangible and formal constituents of the image—its texture, thickness, coloration, line, etc.—seldom arouse his interest. One would suspect that his limitations as a critic of painting would make him perfectly suited to be a critic of photography, where the qualities just mentioned are de-emphasized. One would also expect him to be predisposed to photography by virtue of its privileged historical position, as outlined by Benjamin. But whereas he can criticize paintings retrospectively, as the capitalist expression of property relations, Berger's ideology forces him to see photography as being of a different order. Without history to guide him he has no choice but to be ontological. Thus the failings of his approach to photography are related to his position as a Marxist.

And yet Berger is an apostate Marxist, if we judge by *Another Way of Telling.* He strives to prove that photographs can transcend historical determinism. They partake of timelessness, he argues, and thus they rebuke history; they are a solace to the individuals who treasure them because they affirm individuality. The book's large midsection, the photo essay that purports to tell the story of a French peasant woman, sentimentalizes rural village life and depicts life in cities as complex and uncertain. (Most of the photographs are by Jean Mohr, but the two most romantic and pictorial are by Berger himself.) While arguing the need for an awareness of the social meanings of photographs, Berger categorically states that "All the best photographers worked by intuition." Ultimately, Berger's Marxism greatly resembles nostalgia. He overlooks the urban working class of today for a vision of pre-industrial self-sufficiency. In a sense he is not far removed from another Englishman in revolt against his times, William Morris. Consequently, the suspicion arises that Berger has to force himself to appreciate photography; he is much more predisposed and sympathetic to traditional oil painting, whose social function he decries but whose continuity and craft values he cherishes.

The contradictions of Berger's position as a critic are not without some virtues, how-

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ever, foremost among them being his perseverance in claiming the sanctity of the individual, and of individual expression, in the face of an ideology that seems prone to subjugate them. This is why he prefers the peasantry to the proletariat, and why he can admire aspects of Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse. Yet at the same time he recognizes the social component that is part of every work of art, regardless of quality, and he assumes that meaning in art, and in the world, is not fixed, that it is determined by culture and history. To maintain his balance he has had to embrace these contradictions, to remain ideologically fluid, if not ambivalent. Perhaps that is the source of his otherwise unfathomable fashionability: his Marxism bears the hallmark of humanism.

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Music

The real Vladimir Horowitz?

by Samuel Lipman

It cannot be easy to write the biography of a living person. The first problem is that of authorization: asking the cooperation of the subject inevitably raises the possibility of a veto over the whole work, while going it alone deprives the biographer of both private documents and the testimony of the one individual who knows the biographical material better than anyone else. Without the subject's cooperation, the contributions from friends and associates, too, are more difficult to obtain, except for the occasional and suspect expressions of bitterness and rejection. Hanging over everything is the threat of a suit for libel, restricted, at least until a recent court decision, to the complaints of living plaintiffs. When to all these hindrances is opposed the advantage of treating a whole life as a completed field of study, there can be no surprise that the best biographies are written after the subject's death.

But to put the matter this way is to argue on behalf of scholarship. Viewed another way, there is considerable reason for telling the story of a worthy subject while that person still lives and breathes, whatever the obstacles. Relevance and even notoriety attach to the celebrity of the living, which is why publishers are always interested in writings on the famous: the public is always there.

In the world of classical music today only one figure can attract this kind of interest. Vladimir Horowitz is an historically great pianist. Despite his fame, he has made efforts for more than half a century to keep his private life free from public scrutiny. He has spoken to the press only under controlled conditions, and even then he has always taken refuge in a carefully articulated display of whimsical eccentricity. Completely alien to him has been the kind of candor that Arthur Rubinstein displayed in his innumerable media encounters and two autobiographical volumes. Because Horowitz has been so successful at confining the descriptions of his life to superficial generalities, what has been published about him has mostly discussed his piano playing and its effects on audiences.

Despite a restricted amount of personal material on Horowitz, his life has been the subject of unbounded speculation, especially within the musical community. Two much-noted retirements from concert life—one of short duration in the 1930s and another lasting from 1953 to 1965—were the cause of many rumors about the state of Horowitz's physical and mental health. His much publicized marriage in 1933 to Arturo Toscanini's daughter Wanda seemed on at least one occasion on the brink of dissolution. A daughter born to that marriage in 1934 was widely known to be unhappy and a persistent burden to her parents; a bad motorscooter accident in 1957, causing serious injury, and her death under unexplained circumstances in 1975, only fueled further gossip.

Added to the discussion of these subjects

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have been rumors about a still more embarrassing problem, that of the pianist's possibly other than purely heterosexual orientation and behavior. It was widely known in the music world that Horowitz had frequently traveled on his concert rounds with a male companion. It was known that he had limited his teaching almost entirely to young male students. His style of dressing—favoring extraordinarily elegant clothes in striking colors and combinations—seemed hardly typical of revered classical musicians', and his behavior to the press often seemed fey. It was said, too, among pianists, that Horowitz's style of playing, although astonishingly forceful in loud and heroic passages, seemed at times almost artificially refined in delicate and quiet music.

Binding all of this interest and speculation together has of course been that which stimulated it in the first place: Horowitz's extraordinary success as a pianist, both with his real and would-be colleagues and at the box office. Rarely within living memory have earning power and professional respect in classical music so gone together as in the case of Horowitz. From each retirement, whatever its cause, he has emerged more successful than before; his return to the concert stage in 1965, and his first concerto appearance in twenty-five years in 1978, were the major American musical events of their decades. Throughout his seventies he continued to learn and program large new works, and achieved with them a level of performance in no way inferior to that which he had achieved with compositions he had known since his student days. And the public kept coming. Lines at box-office windows, scandals over ticket availability and allocation, high prices—all of these contributed to Horowitz's being the highest paid (per event) classical instrumental attraction of the last decade: his take-home pay from each concert in this period averaged around thirty-five thousand dollars. For the moment, the culmination of Horowitz's career took place last May in London. At the invitation of Prince Charles, Horowitz returned to Europe for the first time in thirty-one years. He played two concerts in London's Royal Festival Hall, the first televised live to the United States. Beginning the concert with *God Save the Queen,* Horowitz took London. and much of the world as well by storm—again.

Now we have the first biography of Horowitz, written by Glenn Plaskin, a freelance writer. This lengthy (over two hundred thousand words) book follows a chronological course through the pianist's long life. The book's text is followed by numerous references to interviews granted to the press by Horowitz and his wife. Included, too, is material from newspaper reviews and biographical articles. Mr. Plaskin, by his own account, has talked to some six hundred and fifty people in connection with this book. Some of these interviews have born fruit; he quotes several of Horowitz's colleagues, including Rudolf Serkin and Nathan Milstein; all of Horowitz's major students, including Gary Graffman and Byron Janis; one of the pianist's traveling companions during the 1940s, Lowell Benedict; a friend during the 1970s, the composer Phillip Ramey (now a program editor of the New York Philharmonic); a close friend during the early 1930s, Alexander Steinert, a composer and member of the Boston music-store family; and Natasha Saitzoff, Horowitz's first cousin and only relative now living in the United States. To all these sources is added a classification described in the notes only as "anonymous source."

The result of all this effort is a book that makes its points by length and repetition rather than by insight and argument. There are here, too, many anomalies. Mr. Plaskin introduces a hostile review from a German newspaper by saying that the review gave Horowitz and his manager "particular reason to pause," although he names no source for this assertion. Horowitz is described, on his own evidence, as having played during the 1922-23 season "twenty-three concerts of eleven different programs containing

1 *Horowitz: A Biography of Vladimir Horowitz,* William Morrow, 607 pages, $19.95.

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more than one hundred different works, and never [having] performed the same composition twice." Mr. Plaskin doesn't explain how this is possible. He also seems insecure about the repertoire Horowitz was playing at this time: he has Horowitz playing the Poulenc *Toccata* and *Presto,* for instance, but they did not appear before 1928 and 1934.

The sloppinesses mount up. Horowitz is described on one page as having failed to practice the Beethoven "Emperor" Concerto properly and sufficiently before a lesson; later Horowitz's own story (told to a "friend") that in 1932, when he was preparing for his debut with Toscanini, he still had never even heard the "Emperor" is repeated by Mr. Plaskin without comment. Other strange things happen in Mr. Plaskin's sources. Dealing with events around 1926, he writes that "Occasionally he [Horowitz] gave mildly indiscreet interviews to the press." He then goes on to quote Horowitz's own words about a visit to a bordello where he practiced the piano while a friend occupied himself with a girl. The footnote at the end of the quotation refers to a 1978 interview with Hubert Saal in *Newsweek.*

Other uneasy formulations betray Mr. Plaskin's uncertainty in dealing with factual material. The English record label HMV is described correctly in one place as being (in 1929) RCA Victor's "London affiliate"; some pages later it is described, wrongly, as "RCA Victor's English subsidiary." Mr. Plaskin accepts without comment Horowitz's statement that his recording of the Liszt Sonata took up eight 78 RPM sides, when in fact (as properly shown in the book's excellent discography) it takes up only six.

Despite their tendency to undermine our faith in the author's grasp of his subject, such carelessnesses would be of little significance were the book to supply original and compelling insight into Horowitz's art and life. But this it does not do. Mr. Plaskin has especially little of interest to contribute to our understanding of that area of Horowitz's life that would seem to be of greatest importance: his piano playing.

Here, Mr. Plaskin is content to echo, often at great length, received opinion. According to that opinion, Horowitz is a paragon of speed, control, sonority, excitement, and showmanship. Even so, his playing lacks emotional penetration, even in the music—Chopin and Liszt pre-eminently—he admittedly plays supremely well. Almost without fail Horowitz has been found to lack sympathy and commitment to the music of the great composers, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. Indeed, much of the musical portion of Mr. Plaskin's book consists of quotations from newspaper reviews, which he presents uncritically.

Mr. Plaskin clearly agrees with the conventional diagnosis of Horowitz's shortcomings, and he has no trouble finding the reasons for them. Put simply, they are greed and ambition, which are everywhere in evidence—even when they don't seem to be. Thus Mr. Plaskin begins a paragraph describing a 1935 Carnegie Hall recital with a review praising Horowitz for showing a "deeply serious communion" with the Chopin B-flat minor Sonata rather than "personal exhibitionism." He then goes on to another review of the same concert, which finds the pianist's attempts to be more than a virtuoso dashed by the audience's enthusiasm for his technical prowess in the program's display pieces. For Mr. Plaskin the point is made: Horowitz was "inevitably attracted to such demonstration because of his vanity and his ever present desire for more success and money."

But there is abundant evidence—in his words, in his playing, and in his business decisions—that there is rather more to Vladimir Horowitz than greed and ambition. He did not always succumb to the pressure to play showy music. A year after the Carnegie Hall concert, for example, he played, as he had before, the Brahms D minor Concerto (certainly one of the few piano concertos to rank, for musicians, with the greatest classical and early romantic symphonies). The orchestra for this performance was the Amsterdam Concertgebouw under the very serious Bruno Walter, whom even Mr. Plas-

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kin describes as Horowitz's "all-around favorite conductor." Mr. Plaskin does not describe the Brahms performance; he doesn't even quote from the press notices. Instead he proceeds to make mention of a subsequent recording session and the pianist's unhappy emotional state. Fortunately, a private-label recording of this performance exists; it is in fact widely available today. It contains an extraordinary performance on the part of Horowitz no less than of Walter—profound, weighty, and altogether glorious. Surely a reader is entitled to know Mr. Plaskin's opinion on this historical document, relevant as it is both to a description of Horowitz's playing in the 1930s and to his musical achievement in general.

There is a discussion of Horowitz's 1940 recording of the Brahms B-flat major Concerto with Toscanini. But here again Mr. Plaskin clearly suggests that his objection to Horowitz is not just that he has played too much music unworthy of him, but also that he has never managed to penetrate great music at all. Again Mr. Plaskin begins his description of the performance (which preceded the recording by three days), with a musically favorable review, this time from Olin Downes in *The New York Times*. The review talks of the pianist's "growth as interpreter"—but immediately Mr. Plaskin takes it all away, now giving the credit to Horowitz's father-in-law, Toscanini, and even quoting Horowitz as a witness against himself:

> When I played the Brahms [Second] Concerto with Bruno Walter it was completely different . . . . Toscanini had his own conception and I followed, even if it was sometimes against my own wishes.

And Mr. Plaskin goes on:

> At the rehearsals, there had been little discussion between Toscanini and Horowitz, for the interpretation had already been carefully planned in Riverdale [Toscanini's home]. "There was no dialogue," recalled orchestral violinist Edwin Bachmann. "The undercurrent was one of fear—Horowitz's fear of Toscanini."

As it is with Brahms, so it is with other great works. Of the pianist's now classic 1932 discs of the monumental Haydn Sonata in E-flat major he only remarks that they were part of a series of "his most brilliant recordings." Of the phenomenal 1934 discs of the immensely tricky Beethoven Thirty-two Variations in C minor Mr. Plaskin says not a word. He is content to describe Horowitz's (unrecorded) 1968 performance of the Haydn C major Sonata by quoting Harold Schonberg's dismissive remarks; there is no mention at all (except in the discography) of Horowitz's—fortunately recorded—great live performance of the Haydn F major Sonata in 1966, with its touchingly inflected ornamentation in the slow movement.

Mr. Plaskin does have a great deal to say about the business aspects of Horowitz's career. Those who care for such matters can learn all they want to know about the artist's fees. They can learn too about Alexander Merovitch, the personal manager who was responsible for launching Horowitz's career (along with those of Gregor Piatigorsky and Nathan Milstein) in Germany and elsewhere during the 1920s. There is much material here too on Horowitz's relations during the 1930s with Arthur Judson, the closest approach to a dictator the American music business has ever known. One can read in this book also about Horowitz's attempts to use smaller managers who might provide personalized service without charging the standard and large commissions of the giants.

Musicians who have often wanted to keep all the fees for themselves by doing without a manager will enjoy reading here about Horowitz's short-lived efforts in this line. In one of the few witty moments in the book, Mr. Plaskin quotes F. C. Schang, one of the long time powers of Columbia Artists Management, writing in *Variety*:

> My company managed Horowitz in the early 1930s, but he left for financial reasons. It

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> killed him to pay commissions . . .'. We all wish him success even if he wants to lone-wolf it in his old age. For by managing his own affairs, Horowitz will have a manager who pleases him and one that he can afford.

Sadly, there is little doubt that for many readers—musicians and laymen alike—the most interesting parts of this book will be the many sections that deal with Horowitz's personal life. Mr. Plaskin strongly suggests that the pianist was from his youth a homosexual; that he married Wanda Toscanini because of the musical power and influence of her father; that Toscanini and Wanda alike destroyed Horowitz's will, thereby producing his retirements and emotional difficulties; that Horowitz was not cut out to be either a husband or a father; that he neglected his daughter and was unaffected by her death; that his wife, despite being a good caretaker, has been callous about his problems and remains so today.

Plainly this constitutes a formidable indictment of Vladimir Horowitz, and of his wife. Insofar as their behavior affected their daughter's tragedy, Mr. Plaskin's accusations—some straightforward and some only implied—have an even darker side.

To be taken seriously, charges such as these must be made to seem something more than plausible; they must be convincing. While a biographer often begins his work on the basis of the old adage "Where there is smoke there is fire," he cannot end there. It is indeed true that the standards of proof applicable to a biography are hardly so rigorous as those required in a court of law. But even in a literary work an author must show that he has done something more than assemble all the available gossip, serving up the result in a sauce of association and suggestion.

Numerous as Mr. Plaskin's interviews and contacts are, evidently he has not been able to get those closest to Horowitz in the past and present to talk, at least for the record. The lips of his physicians are sealed. His lawyers and accountants, too, are unavailable for comment. Many friends—including the pianist Ania Dorfmann and the teacher Olga Strumillo—are absent from the references. So are the personnel of Steinway & Sons, those specialists in both pianos and artists who have been in a position to observe Horowitz closely for many years.

At the center of Mr. Plaskin's problems of demonstration, of course, is the fact that his book is unauthorized. It bears repeating that this lack of cooperation from Horowitz and his immediate family (a classification which includes not only his wife but other members of the Toscanini family) has meant almost no direct personal information from these sources. And from the private material written by those most concerned, Mr. Plaskin quotes nothing but a few letters, all dating from 1951 and before.

As a result Mr. Plaskin is forced to make the spicier parts of his book in the manner of Alice B. Toklas's shortage-ridden "Restricted Veal Loaf." There are a limited number of remarks about Horowitz's liking for homosexual company that are attributable; for the rest Mr. Plaskin relies on assertion without reference. Thus, his first intimation bears no source:

> Moves to extend sexual freedom were then [in post-revolutionary Russia] considered an integral part of the revolution, and the large cities became a haven for groups of sophisticated musicians and artists who enjoyed the bohemian atmosphere. Responding to the freedom of the times, Vladimir would occasionally make something of a spectacle of himself by walking the streets of Moscow in an enormous fur coat, his face apparently shimmering with makeup. It was rumored that he had had a liaison with an older actor in Leningrad and that he spent time with a group of effete poets and artists who took drugs. It was also said that on more than one occasion the family of his friend Simon Barere had to pull him from sailor bars in Odessa.

Then there is Mr. Plaskin's use of anonymous sources. Thus, material about the pianist's homosexuality must be taken on trust. Nowhere is this more true than in the dis-

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cussion of the Horowitz-Toscanini marriage. Mr. Plaskin appropriates friend Nathan Milstein for his argument in the following way:

> Nathan Milstein appears to have regarded Horowitz's predilection good-humoredly. Said one intimate: "Milstein and I met in Prague. He was not going to be able to see Horowitz on October 1 [no year is given by Mr. Plaskin], his birthday, and wanted to give Volodya a present, so he gave me some money and asked me to take Volodya out to a homosexual club when I saw him in Copenhagen. He knew Volodya would appreciate it."

The above is in a footnote; the next text sentence runs (again without a source): "Nevertheless, Horowitz sometimes spoke excitedly about his wedding plans."

Mr. Plaskin's next paragraph is essential to his understanding of the marriage. He uses several quotations to show Horowitz's thoughts about getting married: "Wanda knows I am a little perverse"; "I am not in love. I can't love anyone. I love the piano"; "Toscanini is like an icon to me and Wanda is part of the icon." "Still, I like her as a woman," he admitted, "and when we kiss I feel like a man." All these quotations are credited to anonymous sources.

A reader might feel only slightly more confident of Mr. Plaskin's use of named sources. Thus, in one of the most up-to-date references to Horowitz's tastes, Mr. Plaskin quotes the pianist Charles Rosen, testifying at second-hand:

> Tom [Shepard] told me about the impossible photographs Horowitz wanted for the [record] covers. He kept choosing pictures of himself leaning against the piano, with a very, very long cigarette holder, looking out at the camera like sort of a drag version of Marlene Dietrich. They would then have to persuade him that that was not a very good likeness.

Perhaps the strongest piece of evidence of Horowitz's orientation Mr. Plaskin adduces is the following story, told to him by the Broadway conductor Lehman Engel:

> Wanda and Volodya were not having a glamorous time in Chicago [in 1943], and there was no apparent closeness between them. Wanda was motherly in a cool sort of way but seemed bored and wanted to have some fun, so we played gin rummy in the hotel room after the concert. No one was paying any attention to Horowitz and Wanda didn't seem to care. He seemed to be passive and childlike in her presence. Yet on another occasion he asked me to take him to some male bars, and there he was completely animated, over-eager—anything but timid.

At last, one feels, here is solid material. But even here checking is difficult; Mr. Engel, alas, is now dead.

Whatever the exact nature of Horowitz's sexuality, it is clear that in an important way Horowitz functioned as a heterosexual. For Mr. Plaskin this is itself a subject for attack. He tells us, without citing his sources, that Horowitz had been, from 1940, a patient of the esteemed psychoanalyst Lawrence Kubie, "a strict Freudian who was attempting to exorcise the homosexual element from Horowitz." Mr. Plaskin goes on:

> Kubie believed that homosexuality was an aberration that could be "cured." Horowitz, controlled by his wife and psychiatrist and bound in by the repressive social climate of that time, found little validation of his genuine feelings. Kubie's unenlightened treatment only made him feel increasingly depressed . . . Dr. Kubie's treatment seemed, in fact, to be counterproductive, amplifying Horowitz's anguish. "We did a lot of jawboning on our train trips," said Benedict [Horowitz's traveling companion in the early 1940s], "and he told me that his breakdown in Europe was hardly voluntary. It became clear that his attempt to deny his homosexuality, to mitigate it or extirpate it, had been a prime factor in that breakdown."[2]

2 Mr. Plaskin does give the source, an interview with Lowell Benedict, for this quotation.

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From here it is not very far to Arthur Rubinstein's remark, from a 1980 interview with Mr. Plaskin, that "Wanda was a very hard woman—hard as stone. They really never had a happy marriage and the weight of this fact certainly contributed to Horowitz's nervous collapse." And even Rubinstein's words, harsh as they are, seem cautious compared with the quotation that immediately follows them—from yet another anonymous source, though admittedly a source "not sympathetic" to Wanda or her family:

> . . . after his marriage, Horowitz forfeited a chance for personal happiness. Toscanini and Wanda slowly broke his back, and he simply did not have the resources to combat such pressure.

Not only does Mr. Plaskin blame Horowitz's troubles on the efforts of those around him to interfere with his sexuality, he also blames the fate of the pianist's daughter on a lack of attention:

> Largely neglected by a self-absorbed father and a mother whose self-defined purpose was to minister to her genius husband, Sonia began to behave in an aggressive and unpredictable manner . . . Horowitz's attitude ranged from indifference to feeling burdened by Sonia, while Wanda seemed to be more concerned with the child and to feel some guilt over her condition.

Mr. Plaskin later attempts to show that Horowitz was even willing to deny his daughter's paternity. He quotes Philip Ramey on Horowitz's explanation for his wife's refusing, at the last minute, to attend a party:

> In the taxi, Volodya grinned and said "don't worry. Now we'll have more fun! She is depressed and neurotic and very difficult. You know, her daughter died." I was a little startled by that, and shot back, "*Her* daughter?" "Yeah," he replied, suddenly looking glum.

Even when attributed, all this is dreadful stuff, but it is even more dreadful when it is based, in its most damaging part, not on hard evidence but on either the testimony of anonymous sources or the recollections of one-time associates and acquaintances. Yet, hard as it might be for a fastidious reader to admit, there could indeed be a reason for dragging all this dirty linen out in public. That reason consists in using an artist's personal life to explain his art.

Given his desire to downgrade Horowitz's musical accomplishment, Mr. Plaskin might have laid Horowitz's concentration on the small works of a less profound nature to his sexual orientation. He might have tried to make the case that a man of Horowitz's psychology could not understand late Beethoven. He might have asserted that supposedly brittle Scarlatti sonatas and delicate Chopin mazurkas are more suitable to an essentially feminine temperament than are Bach fugues. Along the same lines, he might have attempted to cast some light on the particular magic by which Horowitz was able to realize so completely the Sonata (1949) of Samuel Barber, a composer who, unlike Horowitz, never married and who moved in a largely homosexual musical world.

Unfortunately, Mr. Plaskin is content to leave the connections between Horowitz's art and life unexplored, except for the crassest considerations of self-interest and career. To say that he might have tried to explore them is not to say that he would have been successful. The ties binding sexuality and artistic expression are both subtle and complex and it may well be that any definitive account of their relationship is impossible. At any rate, he might have tried, and he did not.

Certainly Vladimir Horowitz has a right to be remembered in some other way than by this scrofulous book. That other way is by his playing, as it exists in the memories of his audiences and in the many phonograph records he has made. *In toto* his records achieve a higher standard than that achieved

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by any other pianist of this century. It will be remembered too that Horowitz left RCA Victor—and Mr. Plaskin himself tells the story—because the company wanted him to boost his falling record sales by recording Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue.* Horowitz refused, because he took his art seriously. There are worse epitaphs.

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Theater

No time for comedy

by Mimi Kramer

"The fate of all of us artists," according to Henry, is "people saying they preferred the early stuff."

Henry is the hero of Tom Stoppard's new play in the West End in London. A successful playwright with a passion for cricket, Henry is arguably a Stoppard-like figure; and when Roger Rees delivers the lines smiles of recognition go round the house at the suggestion of the author's own voice behind his hero's plaint.

Nevertheless, when *The Real Thing* opened at the Strand Theatre in mid-November, Henry himself—had he written the play—might have been relieved at the favorable reception it got. Reviews, on the whole, were warmer than they were tepid and the critics drew none of the invidious comparisons with earlier work that a playwright, evidently, awaits with such grim resignation. The reviewer for the *Guardian* seemed to encapsulate the general feeling when he applauded *The Real Thing* as "an intelligent play about love."

Offhand, I can think of no statement that quite so succinctly misses the point of Stoppard's new play. Henry is not simply the hero of a better-than-average romantic comedy, but a man who makes his living *writing* romantic comedy. *The Real Thing* is only "about love" insofar as it is about whether plays should be about love at all.

Like most romantic comedies, *The Real Thing* follows the personal life and adventures of its hero. It is not quite a simple case of boy-meets-girl, though. For a start, boy-ditches-girl is what sets the whole thing off. Henry (Roger Rees) leaves Charlotte (Polly Adams) for Annie (Felicity Kendal), the wife of Max (Jeremy Clyde). Henry, Charlotte, Max, and Annie; Felicity, Jeremy, Polly, and Roger. If Stoppard's new play asked merely whether Henry and Annie's new union, born of changing partners, would turn out to be "the real thing," then "Who cares?" might be a fair reply. The play's title may suggest love, but it suggests at least one or two other things as well.

All playwrights create an illusion: that is what theater is. Every performance of every play relies on a misrepresentation of reality: the assumption that whatever is happening on stage is happening there for the first time. What theater has—and no other literary form is quite like it—is the capacity to remind us that illusions exist. Some playwrights make more use than others of the phenomenon of illusion inherent in the experience of theater. Some exploit it not at all; some return again and again to the play-within-the-play, as though a failure to exploit the illusionary quality of theater will leave it dangling from a play like a useless limb. Dreams, dissemblers, and divinities are all merely different types of "apparition" which playwrights have used at various times over the centuries to bring home to us the difficulty of making moral decisions in a world haunted by shadows. Euripides and

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Shakespeare were among the theater's most committed illusionists. Tom Stoppard, who has been flirting with the idea for years, begins his new play with a *trompe-l'oeil,* and London, when the play first opened, buzzed with news of the surprise.

The audience at the Strand Theatre, like any audience in any theater, has come in order to be deceived. The curtain rises to reveal a series of scrim-covered panels through which the stage is partially visible; the audience experiences a hazy moment of transition, a vision of the world we are about to enter, half-glimpsed through gauze. The panels rise, slowly, one by one, and we see a cluttered interior dominated by a large cluttered table. From the easy, tasteful Le Corbusier furniture to the easy, tasteful glass of white wine, everything in the room screams "professional class!" A large model of a modern hotel complex whispers, "architect, in fact," and facing us, deep in concentration, a man kneels behind the table constructing a house of cards. This (if we glance at our programs) is Max. Enter Charlotte, his attractive and obviously professional wife, suitcase and airport bag in hand, just back from a business trip to Switzerland. The man is clearly on edge and his behavior downright unfriendly. He lurches about the stage striking poses and uttering long, ruthlessly witty monologues about digital watches and the reliability of the Swiss. "What have I done?" asks his wife, finally. "You went to Switzerland," he replies, "without your passport." Charlotte asks only enough questions to elicit the information that Max spent the period of her absence rooting through her possessions in search of a sign of infidelity. Max continues to behave like something out of a bad Noel Coward play. He is extremely rude and extremely entertaining:

> I notice [says Max] that you never went to Amsterdam when you went to Amsterdam. I must say, I take my hat off to you coming home with Rembrandt placemats for your mother. It's those little touches that lift adultery out of the moral arena and make it a matter of style.

When Charlotte has had enough, she picks up her suitcase and follows her exit line out the door, leaving Max to resume work on his house of cards.

Blackout. Diana Ross, somewhere, is singing her heart out. Lights up on a room more sparsely furnished than that in the first scene, but clearly decorated by someone in the same income bracket. A bearded man is listening to Diana Ross and littering the floor about him with what appears to be the rest of his record collection. Charlotte, dishevelled and wearing a man's dressing-gown, emerges from a doorway at stage right. From the set-up and the opening dialogue it is clear to us that the bearded Henry is the illicit lover whose connection with Charlotte provoked the display of verbal pyrotechnics in the last scene.

At what point we realize that Charlotte and Henry have been married for years depends on whether we note first their conversation ("Do you remember when we were in some place like Bournemouth or Deauville . . .") or the Hockney portrait of Charlotte and Henry seated on the sofa behind which it hangs. What we have just witnessed was not "a scene" between a married couple, but a scene in a play about a married couple. A play written by Henry. A play called *House of Cards.* This is what is known in the illusion biz as blurring the distinction between illusion and reality. Its purpose, of course, is to do precisely the opposite: to bring the audience to recognize that illusion and reality are distinct, although they can easily be made to appear like one another.

If a play begins with a trick like that and presents a set of characters who happen to be actors and playwrights and in whose conversation the words "real" and "really" are forever cropping up, if a play contains a lengthy debate about the relative merits of two very different kinds of plays as well as lines, passages, and even whole scenes from plays of every genre, from revenge tragedy to bedroom farce, then five will get you ten that the play is going to be about theater and illusion at least as much as it is about love.

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Nevertheless, the London critics discussed the idea of romance implicit in the play's title and left aside the whole issue of illusion. Just why is easy to see: *The Real Thing* presents a number of ideas about theater that are in England at the moment unfashionable in the extreme.

The London intellectual establishment right now takes rather a dim view of theater that is not socially significant. A number of recent plays imported from the West End and the Royal Court Theatre in Belgravia are playing in New York this year: Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls,* and David Hare's *Plenty.* Julian Mitchell's *Another Country,* which opened here in January, recently received the Society of West End Theatre award for best play, while the award for best musical went to *Poppy.* All of these are plays with what the English call "ideological content," short for "a political message that is ideologically sound."

Stoppard's new play suggests that there is a value in theater which has no overt social significance or political message. The play suggests, in fact, that theater is perhaps not at its best when it is doctrinaire, an idea that was not likely to meet with wild enthusiasm from your average opening-night West End audience.

Still less destined for a warm reception in the West End was the implication that playwrights are not the only illusionists around: that there are also fashionable people like the characters we meet in the second scene of Stoppard's play, who have fashionable political views and fashionable tastes in music to adorn their fashionable living rooms in nice parts of London; who, like the actor Max and his actress wife Annie, go to protest meetings when they're not playing squash; who, like Max and Annie, might have strong objections to American missile bases in Norfolk as well as weekend cottages there; and who might, like Max and Annie, want to make a *cause célèbre* out of Brodie, a young soldier whom Annie once met on a train on the way to an anti-nuclear-arms demonstration. Brodie is now serving a prison term for arson, having set fire to the wreath on a national war memorial. Henry, who maintains that "Public postures have the configuration of private derangement," doesn't take Brodie quite so seriously. To Henry he is

> an out-and-out thug, an arsonist, a vandalizer of a national shrine . . . mouldering in jail for years to come owing, *perhaps,* to society's inability to comprehend a man divided against himself, a pacifist hooligan.

It is through his hero that Stoppard suggests that another set of illusionists are the radical-liberals who have what Henry calls "the desire to be taken for properly motivated members of the caring society."

For the people who walk into the Strand Theatre convinced that they know what good theater ought to be, Stoppard presents a kind of Aristophanic debate between the fashionable position (that theater, in order to be justified, must be given a social function) and the comic position (that theater has an inherent social function and justifies itself). It is an old idea Stoppard is resurrecting here: that the function of theater is not to induce unshakable commitment to a fixed idea, however worthy, but to render up what Northrop Frye calls "the pattern of a free society"; that comedy is "designed not to condemn evil but to ridicule lack of self-knowledge."

In support of the fashionable stance, *The Real Thing* advances three propositions about theater: that a play is good only insofar as it reflects life realistically; that a play is good only insofar as the person who wrote it has a need to be heard; and that a play is good only insofar as it takes as its subject matter an issue of social significance. The three big ones—and Stoppard allows a good case to be made for each of them. Instead of answering these arguments by putting doctrine into the mouth of his hero in the form of a sustained speech or series of speeches, Stoppard turns the play into a demonstration and gives an example of how comedy, even apparently trivial comedy, can be about something moderately important.

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The first attack on theater comes from Henry's wife. Charlotte has no illusions herself, but the "apparition" with which she has least sympathy is the tidy, drawing-room-comedy picture of life she helps to recreate every night in Henry's play. "You don't really think," says Charlotte, "that if Henry caught me out with a lover he'd sit around being witty about placemats. Like hell he would." Charlotte's objection to Henry's theater is its artificiality: "Having all the words to come back with just as you need them. That's the difference between plays and real life." On this point Stoppard becomes Charlotte's ally. Almost the first thing to strike us about the second scene was its difference in texture from the scene before: the difference had as much to do with the density of laughs per word (Ah, yes! That's how people really talk . . .) as with the number of props per square inch of stage (. . . and that's what people's houses really look like). On stage, Charlotte had played Max's straight man, but in real life Max turns out to be a master of nothing but the slow burn, while Charlotte gets the laughs: "If he'd given her a lover instead of a temporary passport we'd be in a play."

Stoppard does give his hero a lover and in the third scene we see Max confronting Annie with her real-life infidelity. The scene lasts only a few moments, just long enough for us to contrast Max's messy, inarticulate pain with the easy, careless virtuosity of the husband in Henry's play. Even the arrangement of the furniture in the third scene reminds us of the stage set for Henry's play, inviting us to contrast the two Maxes, on stage and off, and to agree with Charlotte that Henry's sort of theater has very little to do with real life.

Charlotte wants more realism in Henry's theater; Max wants more realism in Henry's life. "Having all the answers is not what life's about," Max tells the flippant Henry of Scene Two. And he gives the flippant Henry an alternative:

> Brodie may be no intellectual, and I'm not saying he's a saint either, but he did march for a cause, and now he's got six years for a stupid piece of bravado and a punch-up . . . . That's what life's about.

If that's what life's about, then Annie gives Henry a chance to write about something "real." In Act II Annie comes to Henry with a play Brodie has written at her instigation in an attempt to revive flagging public interest in his case. Henry reads a bit of it out loud: a long, uneventful dialogue whose high point is a light quip about fascists and train timetables. "It's no good," says Henry. "He can't write. He can burn things down, but he can't write." Annie tells him that he is "bigoted about what writing's supposed to be like." Henry goes dashing offstage muttering something about his cricket bat and, for a moment, when he comes back with the thing, we think he's going to hit her, but:

> This thing here, which looks like a wooden club [says Henry] is actually several pieces of particular wood cunningly put together in a certain way so that the whole thing is sprung like a dance floor. It's for hitting cricket balls with. If you get it right, the cricket ball will travel two hundred yards in four seconds, and all you've done is give it a little knock . . . What we're trying to do is to write cricket bats, so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might . . . *travel* . . . [*He picks up the script.*] Now, what we've got here is a lump of wood trying to be a cricket bat, and if you hit a ball with it, the ball will travel about ten feet . . . . [*Indicating the cricket bat.*] This isn't better because someone says it's better, or because there's a conspiracy by the MCC to keep cudgels out of Lords. It's better because it's better.

Brodie, Annie tells him, is "writing to be heard." Unlike Henry, who has to think of something to write about, Brodie "really has something to say."

This is Stoppard's second attack on theater. Charlotte has maintained that Henry's plays are artificial because they don't reflect the quality of real life. Now Annie accuses

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Henry's plays of being artificial on different grounds. Henry only writes because he is a writer:

> Then somebody . . . comes along, like Brodie, who really has something to write about, something real, and you can't get through it. Well, *he* couldn't get through *yours,* so where are you? To you, he can't write. To him, write is all you *can* do.

Annie wants to do Brodie's play: she has a producer and wants Henry to help Brodie write it. "I can't," says Henry, "help somebody who thinks, or thinks he thinks that editing a newspaper is censorship or that throwing bricks is a demonstration while building tower blocks is social violence . . . . Words don't deserve that kind of malarkey." Annie doesn't care about words. She cares about people, and she gives the classic liberal retort: "And who wrote it, why he wrote it, *where* he wrote it—none of these things count with you?" Henry doesn't even flinch:

> Leave me out of it. They don't count. Maybe Brodie got a raw deal, maybe he didn't. I don't know. It doesn't count. He's a lout with language . . . . I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you're dead.

In the debate over what constitutes "good" theater, it is Henry's daughter who brings the charge of triviality against him. *House of Cards,* Debbie complains, "wasn't about anything except did she have it off or didn't she?" And she adds, not unkindly: "Infidelity among the architect class. Again." The trouble is that Debbie has a point and no one knows this better than we do. The scene we saw from *House of Cards,* for all its engaging capacity to amuse, had the hollow ring of theater that is essentially about nothing. Because Stoppard wanted to effect a contrast between the quality of stage dialogue and the quality of verbal commerce in life, he gave us, in Henry's play, theater at its most artificial. And because he wanted us to think about Debbie's implied question—Why, after all, *should* theater be about love?—he gave us theater about something that looked dangerously like nothing. Debbie's attack on Henry's brand of theater is, of course, a direct challenge to his position on Brodie. For if Debbie is right and Henry's plays, however cleverly contrived, are about nothing, then why shouldn't Brodie's plays get equal time?

The attack on theater is now complete. Henry's plays, says Charlotte, are unrealistic. Ah well, says Max, that's because Henry hasn't got the first clue what life's about: real life's about things like idealistic young men who march for what they believe in and become victims of a corrupt system. Moreover, says Annie, *that's* what plays should be about. After all, chimes in Debbie, what *you* write about isn't important.

Henry's and Brodie's are not the only plays within *The Real Thing.* As references to play after play spin by us we begin to realize that love is not the "bourgeois" invention of Philip Barry and Feydeau. As we are reminded of Webster and Chekov, Strindberg and Ford, Ibsen and Noel Coward, we realize that plays have always been about love—of all sorts: incestuous love, adulterous love, clandestine love, and love outside of its social context, in Cheapside, in Knightsbridge, in the provinces, or in the Count's kitchen. And as scenes from plays are read or rehearsed before us, crosscut with the action and arguments of Stoppard's play, we begin to wonder why.

Look, Dad, says Debbie, nobody really gives a toss who sleeps with whom. So Stoppard tests the proposition out. He gives us a play about love and a chance to say "Who cares?" In post-Sixties London, a world where a former husband and wife can talk dispassionately about marital fidelity and where, when a seventeen-year-old girl elopes, her middle-aged father can offer to carry her backpack to the door, Stoppard gives us a marriage—not even a first marriage—and brings that marriage to a crisis.

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("It's only a crisis if you want to make it one," says Debbie. "Why would you want to make it one?")

In Act I Stoppard used similarities of detail between his play and Henry's play to emphasize the contrast between theater and real life. Now he makes his play resemble Henry's on a larger scale, turning the offstage character, Brodie, to purposes of subplot. "You go through my things when I'm away?" asked the puzzled Charlotte of Henry's play. "Why?" In Act II Charlotte will tell Henry, her ex-husband, an amusing anecdote about her ex-lover going through her bathroom cabinet while she was away. Charlotte is a woman with no illusions—"There are no commitments," says Charlotte, "only bargains"—and she will wind up a rather lonely figure. But Annie, as the lights went down on Act I, was beginning a systematic search through Henry's papers and listening to a chorale from "Sleepers, Wake!"

"It's normal to be jealous," Annie tells the irritatingly secure Henry of Act I. "You don't care enough to *care*!" And Henry, when Annie first approaches him with Brodie's play at the beginning of Act II, knows what his priorities are. "Do you have a professional interest in this," he asks, "or is it merely personal?" But when Annie flounces out of the room at the end of the row Henry is driven to ask, "Why Brodie? Do you fancy him or what?" Brodie is a threat to Henry not in himself but because if Henry will not take an interest in him for Annie's sake she can find men who will. As Stoppard's play begins to mirror the comic crisis in Henry's play, we hear Henry asking Annie, "Did you?" and we know that we are meant to be wondering, "Will she?" and there comes a moment when Stoppard says, "Now, do you care?" and you find that you do. Even knowing that you shouldn't, you care.

"Well, of course you care," someone might argue. "You *like* Henry. He's a lovely fellow standing around making jolly speeches about cricket bats and immortality through verse. Besides, he loves Annie—no, I mean *really* loves her—and anyway, Roger Rees could make Trotsky care about the New York Stock Exchange!"

All that may be true, but none of it is an answer to Debbie. Her question still stands. Why should plays be about what they have always been about: relatively middle-class people and their lives and loves sent sprawling by mistaken identity and mistaken assumption?

It has to do with something Henry said to his daughter, not about theater but about love. He described love as a kind of "knowledge" and the images he used were drawn from theater and the language of illusionists: ". . . what lovers trust each other with [is] knowledge of self, the real him, the real her . . . the mask slipped from the face." Drawing an image from his own play, he called that knowledge "the undealt card," which,

> while it's held, it makes you free and easy and nice to know, and when it's gone, everything is pain. Every single thing. Every object that meets the eye, a pencil, a tangerine, a travel poster . . . . Pain.

Love, for Henry, is important not because it is the *sine qua non* for happy-ever-after, but because love is the great transformer. That is why it has always been the subject of comedy: as a force that has the power to change things—the lover, the beloved, the physical world—by changing the lover's perspective: "I love love," Henry tells Annie in Act I:

> I love the way it blurs the distinctions between all the people in the world who aren't one's lover. Only two kinds of presences in the world. There's you and there's them.

For Henry, love is the proper study for theater because to study love is to be reminded of the ease with which things can be transformed so as to appear other than they are: more important, more beautiful, more right. In Henry's view there is a danger in forgetting that a changed perspective changes the shape of things:

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> There is, I suppose, a world of objects which have a certain form, like this coffee mug. I turn it and it has no handle. I tilt it and it has no cavity. But there is something real here which is always a mug with a handle.

But abstract concepts, like "politics, justice, patriotism," are not "like coffee mugs." It is impossible to tell, just by looking at them, whether they seem the way they do because of how they really are or because of perspective:

> If you know this and proceed with humility, you may perhaps alter people's perceptions so that they behave a little differently at that axis of behavior where we locate politics or justice; but if you don't know this, then you are acting on a mistake.

We care about Henry because by the time we are asked to do so Stoppard has linked plot (Henry's life) with theme (Henry's ideas). Stoppard, like Henry, is writing about passion for the same reason that Shakespeare and Euripides wrote about it. Passion is a sort of shorthand for the idea of illusion in the question comedy has asked since the beginning: given the good man's desire to stay on the sunny side of conscience, if you can't tell, then how can you know?

"Why a play?" Henry asks Annie when she first comes to him with Brodie's message to the world. Throughout *The Real Thing* we have seen that theater can be put to a number of purposes, both on stage and off. We have seen it used by Henry for entertainment and by Annie for politics. We have seen it used for social purposes, when characters use plays or bits of plays to ingratiate themselves with one another. We have even seen it used for anti-social purposes: when we finally meet Brodie and he turns out not to have been what he seemed, Henry and Annie use theater to exorcise him from their lives. Ignored while they come to an understanding, Brodie the illusion becomes a member of the audience: "I'm still here," he points out belligerently, and Annie uses an old show-business trick to get rid of him.

We have seen Stoppard use theater, too, throughout. He uses it to bear Charlotte out on the discrepancies between art and life. But Charlotte confuses artifice with artificiality rather too readily, and Stoppard's own play has been full of artifice. Like Henry's, it was tidy. Nothing is random or gratuitous. If an object like a handkerchief or a digital watch came up once it would come up again, as though to remind us that even a play about plays can lay claim to certain pretty unities absent in life.

Stoppard seems to be suggesting that there is a place for illusion in life as there is in theater. Characters in the play end up happy or unhappy depending on their ability to incorporate theater into their lives. We began with an illusionary couple and moved, in Scene Two, to a realistic quartet of characters each with a different capacity for self-delusion: Henry and his wife, a rather bitter woman with no sympathy for theater, Annie and her husband, a rather simple fellow with little sympathy for reality. In the slight regrouping which occurs, Charlotte ends up alone. Henry and Annie find a balance between artifice and realism through the sustained piece of theater that Annie organizes to preserve a fiction about Brodie. As it turns out, he set fire to the Unknown Soldier's wreath not out of ideological altruism but because he was a scared kid going AWOL and wanting to impress her. Henry, meanwhile, afraid of losing Annie to other men who don't feel quite so strongly about literary standards, has had to write Brodie's play and, in his stock role as jealous husband, has had to find a sort of scrim-like twilight-land between drawing-room comedy and blood-and-guts realism. But just before the final curtain, we hear from Max again. He rings up to say that he, too, is marrying again. "Really?" we hear Henry say, "Across a crowded room, eh?" And the lights go down to the tune of the Monkees' "I'm a Believer."

Stoppard's new play is neither a vacuous bedroom farce nor a defense of vacuous

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bedroom farce. It is, however, a defense of non-"ideological" theater. It suggests that the function of theater in society is not to present life as it really is (truth unmixed with art) but to explore the proper balance between art and truth in life. Indeed, *The Real Thing* suggests that the only really meretricious kind of theater is that which parcels out received ideas in the form of truths and presents them to the audience authoritatively franked with the official stamp of right-thinkingness. Theater, Stoppard suggests, with illusion as its medium, irony as its natural mode, and dialogue and rhetoric as its tools, was never meant to inspire complacency. In Stoppard's view, the man or woman who writes plays that send society back out onto the streets convinced of certain truths ought perhaps not to be writing plays at all but some other form of literature: op-ed pieces, or campaign speeches, or political tracts. A natural battleground for conflicting ideas, theater was made to make men laugh (or weep) and question.

"What, no time for comedy?" asks Stoppard, and he begins to laugh.

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Art

Manet in Paris

by Dan Hofstadter

Fantin-Latour painted him wearing a top hat, dark jacket, and dove-gray trousers, and holding a walking stick across his thighs with both hands, the right glove clasped in the left fist, in an attitude of aristocratic mastery. This, one feels, is not only how Fantin saw him but how he wished to be seen: standing under the awning at Tortoni's or on his way to the races, his brow slightly knit in a fine masculine seriousness—"cette tête," as Fantin put it, "de Gaulois."

When Manet posed for Fantin he had already been settled for some five years—since his father's death in 1862—in a spacious apartment on the rue St.-Petersbourg. With him lived his mother, his wife, and his wife's little brother, whom he treated like a son. Fantin's splendid portrait at once went up in the parlor, to preside over a domestic interior and a family circle quite as bourgeois as any in that upper-class neighborhood. It was a district called "Europe" from the names of its streets—Moscou, Turin, Rome, etc.—which Baron Haussman had designed during the second phase of his rebuilding of Paris, after the annexation of the suburban area between the city proper and its outer fortifications. The rue St.-Petersbourg, a mere stump a few years earlier, had recently been pierced through a maze of hovels, muddy lanes, and colony gardens all the way to the Place Clichy. From his apartment Manet could easily walk to the Gare St.-Lazare, or to his friends the Hirsches in the newly opened rue de Rome, where the gardens of fashionable villas overlooked the railway cut leading to the station; or he could stroll to Clichy itself, where he favored a café called the Nouvelle-Athènes. He had a studio first on the rue de Guyot, then on the rue d'Amsterdam, opposite the station; and every time a train went by the paintings trembled. An almost daily visitor to the studio was the timid, rather beautiful, middle-aged but still unknown poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who taught English at the nearby Lycée Condorcet. Mallarmé had to cross over the railway bridge to get to work, and he confessed that every time he did so he felt like throwing himself on the tracks before a train.

This railway bridge—the Pont de l'Europe—is the subject of a painting by Gustave Caillebotte. Leaning on the cast-iron balustrade, his head in his hand, a man is staring down at the tracks as Mallarmé must have done in his blacker moods; behind him a dog lopes by. If you cross this bridge and follow the rue St.-Petersbourg (now Leningrad) till you come to its intersection with the rues de Moscou and Turin, you arrive at the subject of another Caillebotte called *Rainy Weather*; and it is not hard to imagine Manet as one of the figures in this scene, which is located on his street and only a few doors down from his house. Of medium height, well-muscled, chestnut-haired, and clad in a top hat and short coat like the other bourgeois about him, he too would be carrying a shiny umbrella from the racks of the

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Bon Marché; only his elegant rolling gait would seem a little distinctive. Behind him the six-storeyed blocks of flats, each with its rows of pedimented French windows, corbeled balconies, and flue-studded chimneys, would stretch away into a drizzly distance; within a short time the people would almost wholly vanish from the sidewalks, only to reappear at the appointed hour like carved figures marching round a clock.

Mallarmé called Manet "the true child of an ancient lineage of townspeople." In fact he loved only Paris and never stayed long anywhere else. For such a thoroughbred, the Eighth Arrondissement, with its identical new buildings scrupulously obeying the laws of perspective, could never be enough. He also needed the café, and more even than the café itself the walk to and from it along the great boulevards of the Ninth. Often enough this probably meant a promenade down to the Madeleine, then back up the Boulevard des Capucines to the Boulevard des Italiens, whose four blocks held all the chic that one might need for an evening's amusement. On the corner of the rue Taitbout was Tortoni's, the old haunt of Talleyrand, Musset, and Rossini. On Sundays Manet liked to lunch there before the concert in the Tuileries, then to return at five to drink and chat with his friends. It was his way of taking what his friend Charles Baudelaire called "a crowd bath." The painter had his own maxim for the practice: "One must be with a thousand people—or alone." And he confessed to another friend, Émile Zola, that he "adored society and discovered secret pleasures in the perfumed and brilliant delights of evening parties." He was fond of the Café de Bade as well, of which his wife once remarked that his studio was really an annex; and later he took up a sort of residence at two other cafés in Montmartre.

The pity of it was that anyone so social could be so ill-used by society. While it is true that many painters, even quite academic ones, were subjected to the same sort of abuse that Manet had to withstand, few could have been as alive as he was to the sympathy of others—and as easily hurt by their indifference. "He has a weak character," Baudelaire ruefully acknowledged; and another ally, the critic Theodore Duret, noted that he "never grew used to the insults showered upon him as an artist" and that he would "fly into a rage at his detractors." In May 1869, Berthe Morisot, the lovely and gifted young woman who was to become his unofficial disciple, wrote her sister Edma that she had discovered him in the Salon "with his hat down over his eyes, looking ever so bewildered; he implored me to search for his painting, not daring to do so himself—I've never seen a face so expressive. He laughed uneasily, declaring at one and the same time that his painting was dreadful and that it would make a great success." On a later occasion she took up the theme again: "That poor Manet—he's so sad. As usual his exhibition is but little savored by the public, which never ceases to surprise him. Yet he told me that I brought him good luck, and that someone had made him an offer for *The Balcony*. I do hope it is sold; only I rather fear that his hopes will be dashed once again . . . ."

Manet's hopes were high enough to be dashed rather often. When he died a hundred years ago at the age of fifty-two, *The Balcony* (in which Berthe appeared, to her great delight, as a femme fatale) was still unsold; so were *Olympia, Argenteuil, Chez le père Lathuille,* and *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. His friends believed that his health had simply been worn away by his nervous susceptibility, by his anger at official scorn and popular ridicule. Thus it is fitting that a major museum should have arranged for a special exhibition to commemorate his death, as the National Gallery in Washington has done[1]; and later this year yet another group of Manet's pictures will be displayed

1 "Manet and Modern Paris" was organized by Professor Theodore Reff of Columbia University. The exhibition will remain on view in the National Gallery's East Building until March 6, 1983. The catalogue, by Professor Reff, is 280 pages long and contains 230 illustrations ($17.50, paperback).

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at the Louvre and then sent on to the Metropolitan Museum in New York.[2]

Professor Theodore Reff, the current show's organizer, has given it a thematic form. On display are works not only by Manet but also by his predecessors, contemporaries, and aesthetic descendants depicting several aspects of Parisian life. These aspects include the railroad station, the café, and the theatrical world; the racetrack and the Norman beach are also well illustrated. For each topic a room has been reserved, and of these rooms the three devoted to "the street as public theater," "the street as battleground," and "the public holiday" are perhaps the most affecting. Altogether about one hundred paintings, pastels, prints, and photographs are on view; and ranged around the great Manets they provide an often surprising contextual background. Yet many of them also have an entirely independent beauty: Renoir's *The Pont Neuf* and two superb Pisarro cityscapes are especially noteworthy. Also quite arresting is André Disdéri's famous photograph, *Dead Communards,* in which the twelve slaughtered rebels, their faces distorted by a hideous rictus which gives them a family similarity, lie boxed in their narrow gabled coffins like the apostles on some Gothic porch. It must be said that many of the major paintings are familiar, since they come from the National Gallery's permanent collection or from the Mellon Collection; the absence of the Geneva and Chicago Caillebottes is regrettable. And the exhibition is by its nature uneven: Maximilien Luce's *A Paris Street in 1871,* representing a pavement strewn with corpses, is scarcely comparable to the important Manets, though it is a first-rate painting and a fine document in its own right. But there are material limits to how many masterpieces may be gathered in one place, and the plan of arrangement offers other rewards. (One only regrets the apparent necessity these days for explanatory labels next to the paintings; the assumption being, I suppose, that every audience is a self-improving one, or ought to be.)

Professor Reff's views on Manet and his era are very engaging, so much so that one tends to bypass the peripheral pictures in order to follow his explication of the central master. In his catalogue he reaffirms the thesis, now generally accepted, that Manet was especially inspired by certain sorts of subject matter. The earlier notion that he was merely interested in vivid spots of color-values, that he "took anything at all," as Zola claimed, "put it in his studio, and began to reproduce it on canvas," is of course preposterous, a naturalistic overstatement of the case for freshness of perception. But this is not all that Professor Reff has to say. It has recently been claimed by some influential writers that Manet's art is practically devoid of a quality they call "pathos," and that he rid his work of all the accents of drama. In this show, if I read him rightly, Professor Reff tries to marshal enough evidence to prove that this view is substantially mistaken; and the question we must ask ourselves is whether he succeeds.

Most of the secondary pictures here have an illustrative as well as an aesthetic value and help to create a setting and an atmosphere for Manet's big canvases. The image of Paris that they bring to mind—especially those depicting "the street as battleground" —is confirmed in the diaries and memoirs of Manet's contemporaries and in his own letters to his wife. The visual aspect of the riots of 1851, for instance, which he witnessed, was captured in several verbal tableaux.

Late that year, when Manet was still a pupil in the atelier of Thomas Couture, Louis-Napoleon seized power in a coup d'état and was opposed in the streets by a large number of demonstrators. On December 4, troops crisscrossed the city all day. "The cries die away, then swell again in a curious antiphony of terror and gaiety," wrote George Sand in her diary. "People saunter by with their hands in their pockets, humming to themselves; sometimes a young

2 The Manet retrospective, organized jointly by the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum, will be at the Louvre from April 15 to August 1 and at the Metropolitan from September 10 to November 27.

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man, wholly alone and in full view of the soldiers, scores a proclamation with his walking stick; matrons gossip and laugh on their doorsteps, then suddenly blanch with fear; workers meet and pass in the street, exchanging a few words; old-clothes men hawk their wares precisely as usual. Then total silence, an empty street. The shuttered shops remind me of a necropolis."

One of the young men with a walking stick might well have been Edouard Manet, for he was in the streets with his pal Antonin Proust at this time, partly to register the visual impression, partly because both cherished republican sympathies. "We went down into the boulevard to have a look," Proust later remembered,

> and they'd just shot a bunch of innocent bystanders to death right on the doorstep of Tortoni's. A cavalry unit charged down the rue Laffite, sweeping all before it, and the picture dealer Beugniet yanked us through the half-open door to his gallery just in time . . . Our chests glued to the street, Manet and I also witnessed the bombardment of Sallandre's on the Boulevard Poissonière. We were arrested and detained in the house on the corner of the rue du Faubourg-Montmartre . . . . With all our fellow art students we later went to Montmartre Cemetery, where Louis-Napoleon's victims had been laid out under a layer of straw with only their heads showing. The policemen kept all the visitors circulating on a shaky platform in front of the corpses. We always retained a terrifying memory of this mournful inspection, which was occasionally interrupted by a piercing cry from someone who had recognized a relative.

About eleven years after this incident, Manet, now on his own as a young painter, executed his first large-scale figure group, *The Old Musician*. Against a lowering sky, on a sort of *terrain vague*, a gray-haired gypsy has seated himself on his carpetbag and taken out his violin. Some people have collected to listen: a teen-age girl holding a baby, two tough-looking little boys, a mysterious fellow in a frayed opera cloak whose eyes are obscured by the shadow of his top hat, and a white-bearded old man with a cane who wears a sort of rag turban. The colors of the scene—black and white and gray, together with some earth reds and yellows—are simple, dignified, and muted even to melancholy. The three central heads, those of the musician and the two boys, are a trifle overmodeled, a device which gives the urchins an apprehensive, hungry look. But who are these people? It was long thought that they were peasants gathered around some itinerant rural fiddler, and that the scene was a pretext for purloining favorite poses from the old masters. What Professor Reff shows in his catalogue is that they came not from the countryside, not (except perhaps for their poses) from other pictures, not even from the boulevards, but from the mean streets.

If from Manet's house on the rue St.-Petersbourg you were to turn and walk back down the street, cross over the railway bridge that so depressed Mallarmé's spirits, and continue for several blocks on the rue de Vienne, you would arrive at the Place St.-Augustin at the head of the Boulevard Malesherbes. Not far from here, on the rue Guyot, Manet had a studio before he acquired his premises on the rue d'Amsterdam. The neighborhood was not then the peaceful residential district that it is today, but a sort of Casbah of winding alleys and dilapidated dwellings into which even the police would rarely venture. It was called "Little Poland," and Baron Haussman had made it his business to raze it. This demolition displaced thousands of poor people—workers, vagabonds, beggars, street entertainers, petty criminals—in a process that Manet himself witnessed. Haussman's construction program was then a popular subject for republican protest: an urban sociologist called Victor Fournel wrote some interesting books attacking it, and Daumier (a great favorite of Manet's) devoted several cartoons to the subject. In one of these, a landlord watching a house-wrecking exclaims that he will raise his rents directly; in another, a worker returning to a street that

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has been reduced to rubble during the day complains that he can't find his wife. As it happened, "Little Poland," an example of such devastation, was the quarter in or around which Manet found most of his models for *The Old Musician,* and Professor Reff and other scholars have identified three of them. The musician was Jean Lagrène, an organ-grinder and leader of a gypsy band (his photo is in the show); the white-bearded man in the rag turban was Guéroult, a locally known Jew and very probably a peddler or "ol' clo' man"; and the shadowy figure behind him in the opera cloak was Colardet, a rag-picker and ironmonger whom Manet had already depicted in his first major effort, *The Absinth Drinker.*

Yet if we linger for a moment before this painting we begin to see that it is more even than a portrayal of some quite individual people (though not the girl, whose face is half-hidden, nor the Jew, whose countenance is a dramatic mask), for there are four distinct gestures or actions being performed here. Two of these, the girl's cradling of her child and the gypsy's tuning of his instrument, are static or arrested, and of no special interest. But Colardet, the absinth drinker in the opera cloak, is making a peculiarly clumsy movement with his left foot, as if to raise himself shakily from the retaining wall on which he is sitting; and this strange gesture Manet preserved through every version that he drew or painted of the man (four in the present catalogue). One might think that this is a drunkard's attempt to steady himself on attempting to rise—Manet himself might have thought so. But severely afflicted alcoholics generally try to balance themselves with a wide stance, the feet planted far apart; and the slack left arm concealed beneath Colardet's cloak suggests that he was actually suffering from a permanent muscular contracture on that side (an "extensor spasticity"). One wonders if the absinth drinker had sustained a cerebral stroke; for if he had, in the absence of any after care for the poor, he would have been condemned to wander the streets as a cripple till he died.

The arrangement of the figures in *The Old Musician* has been described by one writer as "fortuitous," by another as making "no spatial, temporal, or compositional" sense. But there is among the three central figures, the jaundiced-looking gypsy and the two little boys beside him, a sort of frozen wave of emotion. Like the beasts about Orpheus, these ragamuffins of the slums have come together to listen to music. As the fiddler prepares to play, an impulse of expectation radiates from his body toward the two boys. The nearest one, who is of the southern type, dark, full-lipped, and rather sad, has turned toward the fiddler in anticipation of his playing, though his great brown eyes, which seem strabismic or affected by some disability, are unable to focus upon him. In the meantime he has put his arm about the neck of his companion, as good friends often do when they are about to experience something pleasant together. But the other little boy does not respond. Unlike his comrade, he is blonde and fairly "swimming" in his light-colored clothes. He stands motionless, one hip thrust out, his hands hanging limp at his sides, and he wears an expression of the utmost despair, of almost pathological closure against human feeling.

As it happens, shortly before painting *The Old Musician,* Manet had befriended a deranged boy from the ravaged area around his studio on the rue Guyot. The painter, childless himself, was fond of small boys; he doted on his wife Suzanne's younger brother Léon, and did at least two charming pictures of boys, *The Fifer* and *The Boy With a Sword.* Manet's little friend, whose name was Alexandre, helped him out with various studio chores. One day, as the artist was going out, he gave vent to some slight irritation at the child, and later returned to find him hanging from the armoire. (The incident is related in Baudelaire's prose-poem "The Rope," which is dedicated "To My Friend Manet.") Professor Reff, who retells the story in his catalogue, suggests that Alexandre may well have been the "original" of the dark boy in the picture who has thrown his arm about his fairhaired friend; and he also points out the similarity in appearance

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MORTON LIVINGSTON SCHAMBERG

Figure C (Geometrical Patterns), 1914. Oil on canvas, 28 x 16 inches

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between the latter and Pierrot, "the very image of the alienated individual" and the central character in the Théâtre des Funambules on the "Boulevard du Crime," which Haussman was then tearing down. One is prompted to conjecture that the dark boy's arresting eye disability may have been a sign of brain damage, which can be accompanied by a malfunction of the optic nerves. In the days before modern psychological testing, most people couldn't distinguish the symptoms of such brain damage from those of psychic derangement. And the boy's spontaneous clasping of his friend is just the sort of uninhibited gesture of affection that mentally wounded children often make toward their friends and protectors. The irony of course is that the healthy child is too wretched to respond.

Self-destruction was a concern of Manet's; much later he painted a picture of a suicide by revolver. And suffering, sacrifice, and death became the themes of major pictures: *The Incident in a Bullring, The Dead Christ, Christ Scourged,* and *The Funeral,* not to mention *The Absinth Drinker,* which he had already completed. But more important than any of these is *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* of 1868-9.

This large canvas, represented in the present show by a lithographic version in the National Gallery's collection, shows a firing squad shooting a tall man in a sombrero and two of his aides before a stone wall from whose coping the rabble looks on. The tall man is Maximilian of Austria, Louis-Napoleon's half-brother; he was executed after Napoleon, who had installed him as the emperor of Mexico, abandoned him to his enemies under the pressure of foreign powers. The painting was an open political protest against Napoleon's adventurism and irresponsibility. Mr. Nils Gösta Sandblad has shown that Manet clothed his models in French uniforms (he used actual soldiers) to implicate the French government in the murder, and that his depiction of the platoon sergeant reloading his rifle reveals that he was aware that the first volley had not done its job. But the deeper social significance of this painting, embodied in the massacre at point-blank range, could not have become apparent until the events of 1870-1.

The story of Louis-Napoleon's provocation of a war with Bismarck is well-known. But Manet's part in that war, which he related in his letters to his wife Suzanne, is less familiar. As the Germans laid siege to Paris he enlisted in the National Guard and served first on the city's fortifications, then on the battlefield itself. His family (except for his two younger brothers, who served in the garrison security police) he sent to Oloron. "We have continual engagements with the enemy's troops and scouts," he wrote his wife in September, 1870. "Prisoners are often led through the streets, arousing the crowd's curiosity. What we all want right now is the money for a good revolver, which is just the right weapon in case of a surprise attack." A week later he informed her that "we've been fighting all day . . . . Smallpox is rife here, and we are down to 75 grams of meat per person." The following month he told her that "they're butchering cats, dogs, and rats here now . . . . Soon I'm going to get started on some studies from nature. One day they'll be valuable mementos." A few days later he reported that someone in the house had eaten his servant Marie's cat; and to his beguiling pupil Eva Gonzalès, then at Dieppe, he sadly confided his belief that "we Parisians are going to be the actors in a frightful drama: death, arson, looting, carnage . . . . It's so painful just to see Paris now. Lots of people are leaving. It's a calamity, they're actually fighting at the stations to get out."

Parisian civilization had, in the old phrase, gone high; soon it would start to rot. This is not the place to tell the story of the Commune: how Louis-Napoleon surrendered at Sedan, how the populist tribune Léon Gambetta floated over the German lines in a yellow balloon to form a government at Bordeaux, and how the working people of Paris, in their confusion and abandonment, seized the artillery park on the Butte Montmartre and set up a socialist regime. What interests us is that Manet, whose name fig-

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ured among those in the Artists' Committee of the Commune (which included Daumier, Courbet, Millet, and Monet), made every effort to re-enter the city, which he had left after the capitulation. He finally succeeded in doing so three days before the government army invaded. It was then that the "frightful drama" that Manet had foretold came true. As the government troops fought their way down the great avenues that Haussman had designed for just such an eventuality they were met by a hail of howitzer shells, and when they entered the side-streets they were greeted by a cloud of projectiles so thick that the sky darkened: crockery, chests of drawers, dolls, cast-iron stove-doors, ewers and basins sailed through the air. In the working-class districts the women—the famous *petrolières*—poured tow-laden petrol onto the streets and ignited it; the soldiers dragged them out of the cellars by the hair and bayonetted them on the spot. Over twenty thousand people on both sides were killed, many in summary executions, and at least a hundred thousand citizens were arrested. What Manet was doing at this time is not known, but Professor Reff quotes a letter from Berthe Morisot's mother to the effect that Berthe's brother had "met two Communards, at this moment when they are all being shot . . . Manet and Degas! Even now they are condemning the drastic measures used to repress them." Nonetheless, one should not hastily conclude that Manet was a Communard of the deepest dye; he belonged, after all, to the rentier class, and in any case many of the Commune's original supporters had by then grown sick of its curious combination of sinister threats and timid reforms.

What we can scarcely be in doubt of is Manet's troubled response to the new visual aspect of his beloved city. His good friend Théophile Gautier described it in an article ironically titled "A Visit to the Ruins":

> The saints standing sentry under the portico [of the Madeleine, a short walk from Manet's studio] have sustained but a few surface wounds, and the contours of the great building remain unchanged . . . . But in the rue Royal . . . the gutted houses showed their entrails like corpses under dissection . . . . Charred beams, twisted bars of iron, steps leading nowhere like the fantastic stairways in Piranesi's architectural dreams, avalanches of bricks and stone slabs, great panels of wall on which I could still discern the configuration of former apartments with their wallpaper, fireplaces, and some remains of furniture capriciously spared by the flames—such was the grievous spectacle which surprised my view.

Yet on entering the Cour des Comptes he was struck by the ruins' beauty, by their "grand and tragic allure; whatever was harsh or cold in its lines has been corrected by the fractures and intersections of its balusters and acroteria, by the fall of a cornice fragment or the collapse of wall which discovers to the eye an arcade open to the heavens." The Goncourts reacted similarly. "The [Tuileries] are splendid, magnificent," they exclaim in their *Journal*. "In their rose, ash-green, and white-hot-iron coloration, in the brilliant agatization of stone cooked by petrol, the ruins look like those of an Italian palace colored by the sun of several centuries . . . . With its empty niches, its smashed or broken statuettes, the remnant of the clock, the outline of high windows and chimneys which by some strange power of equilibrium still remained standing in the void, with its eroded silhouette against the sky, the building is a marvel of the picturesque, to be kept as it is if only the country were not condemned without appeal to M. Viollet-le-Duc's restorations. Irony of Chance!"[3]

3 Translated by George J. Becker in *Paris under Siege, 1870-1876: From the Goncourt Journal*, Cornell University Press, 1969, p. 216. All other translations are by the author. Material from *Gustave Caillebotte: A Retrospective Exhibition*, by J. Kirk, T. Varndoe, Marie Berhaut, Peter Galassi, and Hilaire Faberman (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1976) was used in the description of the Caillebottes. For the "diagnoses" of the dark boy and the absinth drinker in *The Old Musician* I wish to thank Leg. Psyk. Pia M. Hofstadter and Dr. Jay Patrow.

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It was indeed an irony; and many a potential Grand Prix man must have wondered if there was any point in vying for a sojourn at the Villa Medici, when all he had to do was step outside for an acquaintance with instant antiquity. The streets were piled high with marble ashlar, gable ends, broken capitals, and brass fittings which still seemed to drip and run; and here and there, from within a gaping piano nobile, a long drape of blue or crimson silk, like a triumphal banner, billowed out over the wreckage. On certain streets the rusticated slabs, heaped slantwise like some great moraine or talus chute, approached a geological splendor. The scene might well have made a tourist's paradise if not for the ubiquity of the sentries, firing squads, and photographers.

On May 23, 1871, the day that the government troops occupied the lower part of the Eighth Arrondissement, Manet was for some reason threading his way through the rubble at the intersection of the Boulevard Malesherbes and the rue de l'Arcade, about eight blocks from his studio. Here, according to Professor Reff, he came upon an execution of some Communards, which he reportedly drew on the spot, later reworking his sketch into a lithograph. The print shows a man, dressed I believe in the uniform of the National Guard, with his képi still on, lying before a barricade next to a drum; behind, roughed in with the same loose chisel strokes that enliven the whole picture, is the grille of the Madeleine and the perfectly recognizable lower portion of its fluted portico. What is psychologically remarkable about this lithographic drawing, as Professor Reff points out, is that the pose is a reprise of the one Manet had already used in *The Incident in a Bullring*. In a later lithograph, *The Barricade,* he again reused a composition, this time a part of *The Execution,* only now the format was not horizontal but vertical, as if to emphasize the staunchness of the resisters, and one can clearly make out the courageous face of a dying Communard.

Manet has often been accused of having no power of invention, of cannibalizing his

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own and other people's compositions, and there may be some truth to this. But the practice also reveals what might be called the prophetic character of his work. By this I don't of course mean that he actually predicted the course of the future, but rather that many of the incidents he represented, and especially the way that he choreographed them, foreshadowed characteristic social situations. He had, quite simply, a great eye for the latent meaning of a scene. It was probably, then, to vindicate himself, to reaffirm the justness of his vision, that he returned to his old designs, much as a draughtsman may retrace an outline of whose accuracy he is convinced.

We have noted how one seemingly "fortuitous" scene, depicted in *The Old Musician,* really holds a tiny but very meaningful emotional event—an event that is almost a state of mind. As time went on, Manet's eye grew more and more finely attuned to the medium- and small-sized goings-on in the world. In particular, as if to balance his preoccupation with conflict and death, he focused on the subject of erotic play. By degrees he became a virtuoso at describing the little dramas that take place *entre quat'z yeux*—"between you and me and the bedpost." Major examples are *The Balcony, Argenteuil, The Opera Ball, Nana, In the Conservatory, Chez le père Lathuille,* and *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère.* The present exhibition contains an etching of 1862 titled *Lola Valence,* in which the Spanish dancer sneers faintly at the spectator in an expression charged with sexual innuendo. At the bottom appears a quatrain by Baudelaire ending with the lines: "You can see shimmering in Lola de Valence / The unforeseen charm of a black and coral gem." It is a frank reference to the color scheme of the private parts of meridional women; and Manet later chose just this scheme for *The Ball of the Opera,* in the National Gallery's permanent collection. This is a sort of inspired illustration representing the weekly ball at the old opera house on the rue le Peletier, which was nothing less than a mating ritual. In their tall black hats the male operagoers hover over the courtesans like predators, while the latter, in their black dominoes, and costumes dashed with coral and geranium, simper fawningly back. The men are Manet's own friends, and each one of them, as Theodore Duret noted with some astonishment, wears his top hat at just the angle that he did in real life. "Manet even put me in," he remembered, "or at least a part of my hat, an ear, and a bearded cheek." In his catalogue Professor Reff guides our eye to a leering Emmanuel Chabrier and to Manet himself.

The National Gallery owns a painting called *The Railway* which Manet painted two years after the fall of the Commune. Professor Reff has hung it here among other contemporary railroad scenes—installed it, so to speak, in its habitat. We see a young woman and a little girl at the bottom of one of those highly prized gardens off the rue de Rome, a few blocks from the artist's studio, overlooking the railway cut leading under the Pont de l'Europe. Nothing much seems to be happening. The little girl, her hands on the vertical bars of a grating that fills the entire scene and separates the pair from the tracks below, is staring rather idly down at a cloud of steam from a passing train; the young woman gazes calmly out at the viewer. But if we look closely we can discern a pattern of subtly revelatory gestures. The steam that has drawn the attention of the little girl, who is dressed as if for a party in a white frock with a blue bow, is merely the last evanescent trace of a train which has already passed under the Pont de l'Europe (summarily indicated at the edge of the canvas). In fact, it is already out of the picture and halfway out of Paris. The little girl's hands on the bars hint at a mild yearning for adventure, which is only natural, for she is on the verge of puberty. The young woman (intended perhaps for her sister, for they have shared a length of ribbon, as sisters sometimes do) is sitting on the parapet, facing away from the railroad, her hair floating casually about her shoulders. She is in the prime of her biological womanhood—about

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eighteen or twenty, I should say—and, as befits her age, she has been reading a romance, from which she has just looked up while keeping her place with her thumb. On her lap nestles a sleeping puppy. A cartoon version of this painting in a contemporary newspaper transformed the puppy into an infant; it was a mean but telling jest, for the young woman is at an age when her thoughts turn naturally to child-rearing. Another such cartoon bore the legend, "They tried to run away, but the painter, foreseeing this eventuality, cut off their retreat"—a reference to the grating that bars them from the world of dreams. For it is part of the cultural resonance of this painting that it evades the old pictorial form called "the ages of man" (here, of woman), and how illusions, their compass shrinking from the range of Europe's railways to the covers of a novel, yield to a sense of the here and now. "When such illusions vanish," wrote Baudelaire in lines dedicated to Manet, "when we begin to see a thing such as it really exists outside of ourselves, we feel a strange sentiment compounded of regret for the lost phantasm and pleasant surprise before the novelty of the fact." Reading this, we may ask ourselves if Manet's detachment before "the novelty of the fact," his whittling down of incident till it almost ceases to exist, reduces or heightens our response.

There is in this show a study for *The Tragic Actor* of 1877 showing the singer Faure in the role of the vacillating prince of Denmark, holding a drawn rapier. Seven years earlier, on the eve of the German invasion, Manet himself, exasperated by the harsh reception of his work, had challenged a critic to a duel. This man, Edmond Duranty, was of course a friend—why waste animosity on an enemy?—and the duel came to a speedy end when Manet nicked him near the collarbone. "You don't know how hard I looked for a pair of roomy, comfortable shoes the night before," he told his old companion Antonin Proust. "I finally found a pair in Jouffroy Alley. After the duel, I offered them to Duranty, but he couldn't take them because his feet were too big." This hilarious, saddening story of an artist offering a critic the chance to be in his shoes may serve to remind us—along with the pictures and the prose Professor Reff has placed at our disposal—that Edouard Manet was not only a stroller in the boulevards, but also a walker in the alleys; not only a debonair observer, but also a tragic actor.

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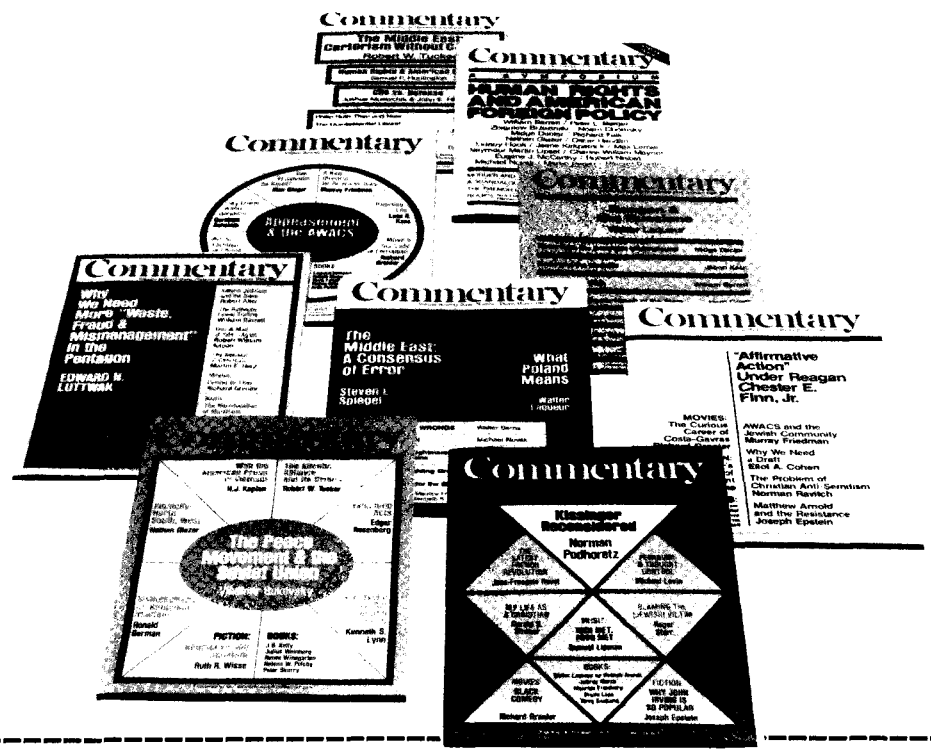

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Books

The art of translation

by David Paul

There's a story, perhaps apocryphal, that Brahms, having written a piano transcription of Bach's D minor Chaconne for violin, decided to play it over to an acquaintance, an eminent Viennese musical authority of the day. The pundit, having listened and feeling obliged to offer some learned and expert opinion, hinted among other things that the transcription *didn't sound much like the violin, did it?* To which Brahms muttered some retort, more gruff than polite, which was perhaps safely lost in his beard. True or not, to my mind the story sums up the objection of the purist to the whole idea of translating poetry: how can a translation be identical with the original, preserving all its intonations, allusions, and sonorities? This simply begs the question of the whole process, which must be to transform—to put the poem into the crucible of another language and make it emerge as close as possible with the original, a twin to it, in a new verbal medium. This is to state the aim of translation as an ideal, never attainable, but there to be kept in mind.

French, at its purest, in its greatest poetry, is certainly the violin among languages. It has the plangent, nasal sonorities, the lingering or pressing vibrato, the linear suavity of that instrument. No wonder that Baudelaire—and Verlaine—have invoked it in sounds that echo its quality. But then almost any line of French verse—

Aveugle irréveillée aux immenses prunelles . . .

Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendu . . .

—has a series of vowel sounds that do not exist in English, or in Spanish or Italian for that matter. And yet French and English are, after all, neighbor languages. Their development, and their basic verse-forms, from sonnet to rhyming couplet, are akin. The problem of translating poetry from one to the other cannot be compared with that of rendering Chinese poetry into English, where every ideogram, it seems, represents a whole phrase, or what one Chinese scholar calls a "word-cluster," and where many parts of speech, vital to intelligible English, do not exist in the original. But difficulties amounting to the impossible can of course exonerate the translator and give him a wider freedom of form and phrase. Which means that the sensuous and formal qualities of Chinese poetry will always remain vague and conjectural to the reader who knows nothing of the language. No such remoteness applies to French. Baudelaire and Rimbaud still inhabit our contemporary world, anticipating and informing it. That is why their work insists again and again on being translated, as if in the hope of being ultimately conveyed with the expressive force and form of the originals.

It is here where the resourcefulness, the assimilative adaptability, of English comes in. If French is the violin, then English must be the piano—a percussive instrument that can sing and at the same time is an instru-

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ment of all work. English must be the most protean of all modern European languages. As far back as the fourteenth century the two chief poets, Chaucer and Langland, were working in two distinct traditions, the Anglo-Norman and the Anglo-Saxon. As poets they were in effect working in two different tongues with different prosodic rules. But their territories are extensions of the same language. From then on English grew increasingly multiplex. There is the Hebraic English of the Jacobean Bible, the Latinate English of Milton (and even Shakespeare at times), of Sir Thomas Browne, and of Johnson. (It was from his immersion in Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Bible that Melville developed his extraordinary prose.) The curious fact is that English, thanks to its mixed origins, its failure to conform to the regularity of the Romance languages, can embrace a wider variety of styles, and in translation can sometimes mold itself to the shape of the original. The Book of Job is full of phrases—"Hath the rain a father?"—that could only have been prompted by the translators' sense of the Hebrew text. And then again there is that famous barbaric steed that "saith Ha! Ha! amid the trumpets." In French he has to be gallicized—*Au son de la trompette il dit: Allons!*—which transfers him at once to Longchamps races on a special day.

This multiplicity of styles in English has generated a corresponding variety of forms and prosodies in verse. It was even thanks to a translation that one of the great forms was born. Surrey's halting, experimental version of a section of the *Aeneid* seems to be the first example of pentameter blank verse in the language. Other forms were overlaid by time. Langland's alliterative, balanced, six-stress line—"In a summer season, when soft was the sun"—is, allowing for time's changes, as natural to the English tongue as any other. It surfaces again, with surprising vigor, divided into two lines, in the poetry of Skelton: "Oh cat of carlish kinde, The fiend was in thy minde . . . . The Wild Wolf Lycaon bite asunder thy backbone." On through later English poetry it reappears at times with a curiously haunting and yet natural effect: "In an arbor green, asleep whereas I lay . . . ." And again in Thomas Nashe's invocation to summer: "Go not yet away, bright soul of the sad year . . . ." Swinburne, who has more technical range and subtlety than he is given credit for, uses it as a stanza ending, with resounding aural effect in the closing scene of "Atalanta in Calydon":

> The years are hungry,
> They wail all their days,
> The gods wax angry,
> And weary of praise.
> And who shall bridle their lips or who shall straiten their ways?

But it was thanks to the influence of Baudelaire, made superficially fashionable by the poets of the Nineties, that this line came more into use. A recent survey of English poetry over the past century begins with Dowson's "Cynara," the one poem of his that has remained in general currency, and remarks its haunting quality. It might well haunt, as it is literally a ghost of a Baudelaire poem, a little pale perhaps, but identical in form, with its unmistakable five-line stanza, its fifth-line refrain ("I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion"), and above all with its troubled, delicate rhythm, carefully varied and controlled within the six-stress line, which Dowson's contemporary Yeats was to develop further. No one seems to have noted that the most hackneyed and sentimental of Yeats's early poems, "Innisfree," is couched in this line. But it takes on much greater force and weight in poems of his middle years, notably in "The Magi":

> Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye
> In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
> Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
> With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
> And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,

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And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find
once more,
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial
floor.

A dark poem that radiates more complexities of meaning in its eight lines than the whole of Eliot's carefully paced, doctrinal piece on the same theme, "The Magi" points the way to the most famous of Yeats's late poems, "The Second Coming." But nearly contemporary with it is "The Cold Heaven," where the same meter takes on a more urgent and turbulent pace, propelling the reader through its twelve lines so quickly that it has to be read again and again—and then compared with a companion piece, "Paudeen," also included in *Responsibilities,* to see how the two poems, in identical meter, reflect, complement, and seem to contradict each other.

Language is a form of image-making; even the commonest speech depends on that to some degree. The art of language, in poetry or prose, is in some sense the art of disciplining the images, of imposing a kind of logic on them that will both control and invigorate them, intensify their visual, emotional, or aural qualities. The aim of the Baroque poet was to effect this more strikingly and economically by establishing a sort of counterpoint between subject and image. That way lay the risk of over-ingenuity. In Donne's "Valediction," the comparison of his parting from his wife with the movement of compasses being stretched to describe a circle extends to twelve lines, but the gravity and passion of the whole poem save it from being a mere conceit. True, Dr. Johnson, in his magisterial arraignment and dismissal of Donne's poetry, did not think so. But then, he was simply making a monumental statement of an already accepted case, as he often did. Donne had gone out of fashion with the Restoration and was to remain in a kind of oblivion until well after Victorian times. Long before Dr. Johnson's dismissal, Pope had been kind enough to "versify" Donne's satires, since the subjects were interesting but the style of writing unthinkable. Baroque poetry was to become anathema for a long time, like all Baroque art. But in dismissing Donne and, by implication, all those poets (Marvell, Crashaw, Herbert) who had followed his example, the taste of the age was abandoning a vital quality along with its possible defects. It was as if the fashion in music had suddenly renounced counterpoint. The disciplined imagery that provides the sinew of Donne's verse did become an obsessive mannerism in nearly all his later religious poetry. But it informs the passion and immediacy of his love poems, and it is here that he comes astonishingly close to Baudelaire at times. Take a famous opening line, "When by thy scorne, O murdress, I am dead," translate it directly into French—"Lorsque par ton mépris je serai mort, O meurtrière"—and at once it seems to wake an echo from somewhere in *Les Fleurs du Mal.* The same applies to "that bracelet of bright hair about the bone" and many other sensual or funereal passages in Donne, whose greatest lyric, the "Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day," that celebration of absence, darkness, and death, might well take its place at the head of the "Spleen" poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal.*

If Baudelaire has so much in common with an English predecessor he had never heard of, it was chiefly because he chose to revert to a similar technical discipline. So much of later eighteenth-century and Romantic poetry is awash with vague, rhetorical imagery, from Gray's "hands that the rod of Empire might have swayed, / Or ruled to ecstasy the living lyre" to Lamartine's "Mélodieux murmures embaumés d'ambroisie" and Shelley's "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is! / What if its leaves are falling like my own." The imagery invokes connections, correspondences that do not work. The same applies often enough to later poetry by well-known hands: the once much-quoted lines by Auden—"All I have is a wish / To undo the folded lie, / The lie of authority, / Whose buildings probe the sky"—sound emotive, the images seem cogent for a moment, but they fail to connect.

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Apart from "A Une Madone," a splendidly individual poem which he describes as being "in the Spanish style," Baudelaire in no sense became a Baroque poet. Nevertheless, he renewed Baroque poetry's salutary qualities, and the influence was to continue in his successors. Mallarmé carried the refinement of image-structure to an elusive ultimate. Valéry's "Song of the Columns" is as thoroughly Baroque a poem as any by Crashaw or Malherbe. No one would apply the term to Rimbaud, but what he called his "Alchimie du Verbe" led him beyond it, in the same direction. A late twelve-line poem, "Le loup criait sous les feuilles," enlists an astonishing chain of heterogeneous images —wolf, forest, white hen, fresh salads, ripe fruits, a spider, a hedge, violets, sleep, milk on the boil, altars, Solomon, a river in Jordan—and presses them all, with clear effect, into the one fatal meaning of the whole poem.

All of these qualities may seem to make translation impossible. Add to this that the sound, form, and rhythm of a poem are essential elements of its meaning—to separate the "content" from these is an illogical operation. They *are* what the poem contains. A literal prose crib of a Mallarmé sonnet is a cryptic statement from which the poem and its motive have vanished. (So much for the literalism advocated by Nabokov.) Add to this that in a good poem the rhyme is not an adjunct or a mere ornament; it is the means whereby sound, form, and meaning are made to clinch. And then one may as well conclude that the only perfect translation would be the poem as written by the original poet, had he lived and worked in the translator's language.

The English language is endless in its ways and means, however, and the durable translations of the past, from the Bible to the *Rubaiyat,* have always added something to the language itself. Fitzgerald introduced a new verse-form and a whole suite of images novel to English, which he contrived to naturalize without reducing their newness.

Similarly, anyone translating French poetry has to confront the ways in which French differs from English. To begin with, rhyme in English is so often hard and consonantal compared with French, where hard rhymes are so rare as to have a certain shock value (exploited with dramatic effect by Baudelaire himself—"Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs"—and again by Valéry in the sudden dismissive ending of "Le Cimetière Marin"). But for the most part, French rhymes find their best equivalent in half-rhymes, assonances like those that often occur in folk poetry and ballads, and that Yeats used increasingly in his later years, sounds that suggest rhyme without emphasizing it. As for movement and rhythm, the French alexandrine is strict in its syllable count of twelve (with the feminine mute "e" ending where it occurs) but perfectly free in the incidence of its accents:

> A-t-on *vu* de ma *part* le *roi* de *Comm*agène? . . .
> *Voi*ci ven*ir* les *temps ou vib*rant *sur* sa *tige* . . .
> *L'om*bre et le *jour* lut*taient dans* les *champs*
> *a*zurés . . . .

A French reading of these lines would give the first line only five emphases, but seven to the second and third, with a telling change in the sense of pace and mood. English on the other hand has always defied syllable count where need be—a blank verse line can hold twelve syllables or more. In fact the rules of prosody, derived from the Greek, are often a coat of convenience: when it fits too neatly the result approaches jingle or doggerel, as often in Kipling. Hardy frequently chose a longer, more irregular line that fits his casual, conversational tone and that can seem regular enough, only occasionally stumbling into prose. A similar line can correspond with the alexandrine without in fact being so regular.

When it comes to translating French poetry, it can always be argued that the classic, traditional alexandrine is the equivalent of the traditional blank verse in English. Richard Howard, in his present translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal,*[1] has chosen

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the latter, with shaped unrhymed stanzas fitting the other forms that Baudelaire used. The effect can be comely:

> Her garments writhe and glitter like long
> snakes
> Obedient to the rhythm of the wands
> By which a fakir wakens them to grace.

But an odd confusion shortly ensues:

> Like both the desert and the desert sky
> Insensible to human suffering
> *And like the ocean's endless labyrinth*
> *She shows her body with indifference*

The elaborate and delicate imagery of Baudelaire's own lines—

> Comme les longs réseaux de la houle des mers
> Elle se développe avec indifférence

—implicitly makes us see the long, shifting networks of foam undulating on the high sea, like the lights and patterns on the woman's dress as she advances, whereas the translation evokes an image which refuses to appear. How can a labyrinth show its body? And the unusual and vivid image—"Elle se développe"—is missed altogether. Since the exigencies of rhyme are eschewed, this should prompt greater naturalness and accuracy, not the computer English that offers only a sort of see-through to the idiomatic original: "The eyes of my child are secret and immense" or "This is the hour to compose yourself, my soul." Too often a striking image in the original is either distorted so as to be unintelligible or simply elided altogether. Toward the end of "Danse Macabre," the angel's last trump appears above the revelers through a hole in the ceiling, "dans un trou du plafond," an image that suggests a detail from Brueghel or Bosch; but here it appears simply as from "somewhere overhead." In "Le Cygne," a "menagerie" is not a poultry market but a small zoo, a circus side-show, and the swan, escaped from its cage and left behind, is not "drenching its enormous wings in the filth"

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but dabbling them hopelessly in the dust of the abandoned lot. The whole passage is a vision of aridity.

In his foreword Howard tells us, "If I could not always love my originals, I have endeavored to serve them by an attempt to leave them alone . . . . Wanting to keep Baudelaire, I wanted to keep him at a certain distance." Only the translator can elucidate the ambiguities here. But when he renders "Sois sage, O ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille" as "Behave, my Sorrow! Let's have no more scenes," he has certainly left the original severely alone in its grandeur. And evasive action is taken with some of the more explicit passages. "Les Promesses d'un Visage," for example, has all the assaulting frankness of a Picasso nude in the original. But in the translation "le nombril jusqu'aux fesses" is paraphrased to "a matching nether opulence." Much of what made the original volume offensive to bourgeois taste at the time is here softened, diminished, distanced, so that even a nineteenth-century magistrate might have hesitated to condemn. In this guise it might not even have merited Henry James's reprimand: "Call this a sense of Evil?" he exclaims, having given his view of the contents, "How very remote from our own dear Nathaniel Hawthorne!"

Translator's luck is like the poet's. One thing comes off, another does not. A poet's strength and skill is to be judged by the amount to which he reduces the chances against. No poet, still less a translator, can reduce them to nil. In the present case some of Howard's best successes are with the not so well-known poems and set pieces—"Lesbos" for instance moves at a stately and convincing pace. And where the pentameter rhythm is sufficiently broken and doesn't carry too many familiar but alien echoes, the results, in "Allégorie" and "La Béatrice" for instance, can be on the whole admirable.

Incidentally, the book is not quite so complete as the publisher's claim implies. The additional poems, written after the suppression of *Les Fleurs,* demonstrate a remarkable renaissance of energy, a further refinement, an increase in range, a salt vigor, in spite of all the sickness, the financial agonies, the frustrations, and the obloquy that dogged Baudelaire during these later years. All these poems are included here with—apart from trifles—one signal exception: "Le Monstre," a masterpiece of imaginative invective and a seasoned, full-length portrait of Jeanne Duval, the woman who made such ruthless inroads on Baudelaire's life, nerves, and time and who inhabits—or haunts—so many of the poems.

Fact into fiction

André Le Vot F. Scott Fitzgerald. Translated from the French by William Byron. Doubleday, 373 pages, $19.95

reviewed by James R. Mellow

At the outset of writing *The Great Gatsby,* F. Scott Fitzgerald complained (and boasted) to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at Scribner's: "I don't know anyone who has used up so much personal experience as I have at 27." It was an apt observation. Despite his reputation as the inventor of the legendary Jazz Age—that overworked cliché about a decade of mindless affluence and irresponsibility that has become the property of television, the movies, and the musical comedy stage—Fitzgerald was, in his odd way, one of the most circumstantial of American authors. A specious glamour does, indeed, hang heavily over the early tales and the first three novels, *This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and Damned,* and *The Great Gatsby*; but the more one learns about the details of Fitzgerald's routine life, as opposed to his sophomoric pranks and scandalous behavior, the more one realizes that his fiction lived close—too close, perhaps—to his personal experiences. The blue lawns of Long Island, the boozy nonstop parties wasting the hours in Great Neck mansions, were neither pure invention nor some alcoholic blur vaguely remembered on mornings after; they had existed in reality, however much Fitzgerald may have

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heightened the effects in the retelling. Fitzgerald had bought the American Dream so early in his career and was so determined to cultivate and sustain it that the principal problem for the biographer and critic is determining the proper balance of fact and fiction in analyzing both the life and the work.

Given the circumstantial nature of the task, it is all the more remarkable that a French writer, André Le Vot, should have written a critical study that does equal justice to the out-of-the-way biographical detail on Fitzgerald's life and to the more accessible critical literature on Fitzgerald's writing. Le Vot, Professor of American Literature at the Sorbonne and Director of the Center for Research on Contemporary American Literature there, has spent some twenty years on the research and writing of his book, which was originally published by Julliard, in Paris, in 1979. He has visited many of the American homesites connected with Fitzgerald's peripatetic life—in St. Paul, Montgomery, Baltimore, Hollywood, and Malibu Beach—before some of them, as he notes, "fell victim to urban development." He is apparently an enthusiast of American music and offers interesting digressions on ragtime, period musical comedies, and the popular show tunes that course through Fitzgerald's stories and novels. He has even searched out information about Fitzgerald's minor professors at Princeton and come up with revealing anecdotes. (Fitzgerald, a quite bumptious young man and an amateur playwright and producer since adolescence, elected to tell Jesse Lynch Williams, his English professor and the author of a 1917 Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway hit, *Why Marry,* all about the structural flaws and technical errors in his play.) Le Vot is as knowledgeable about the American literary scene of the 1920s and 1930s as he is of the reputations of the major and minor authors of the time, and he provides excellent short histories of magazines like *The Smart Set* and *The Saturday Evening Post,* which brought Fitzgerald his first popular and financial success.

In some instances, Le Vot has come up with unusual details that point up the problematic merger of fact and fiction in Fitzgerald's imagination. In *This Side of Paradise,* for example, Fitzgerald devotes several glowing pages to Amory Blaine's romantic impressions of the Princeton campus, with its idyllic greenswards and shadowy lanes, its tall dreaming spires, ivy-covered battlements and arches—a vision inspired more by dreamy thoughts of Cambridge and Oxford than by reality. Le Vot, having researched the Princeton campus at the time of Fitzgerald's arrival in 1913, discovered that the university was engaged in an ambitious building program, that most of the buildings Fitzgerald itemized in such moony fashion were barely a quarter-century old—that is, not much older than Fitzgerald himself. Of those dreaming spires, the most recent, Cleveland Hall, had been completed just three months before and the mortar was barely dry. Yet Princeton would remain for Fitzgerald "the loveliest riot of Gothic architecture in America," and it would become part of his mythology that at his alma mater, unlike rival institutions, there was "no monotony, no feeling that it was all built yesterday at the whims of last week's millionaire." Edmund Wilson, Fitzgerald's college friend and sometime mentor, took a rather different view of the university. Looking back, he would maintain that Princeton "always managed to flourish between the pressures of a narrow Presbyterianism and a rich man's suburbanism." (Le Vot seems to have developed a certain animus toward Wilson—he refers to him as the "haughty Wilson"—perhaps because of Wilson's condescension toward Fitzgerald's intellectual abilities and his occasionally harsh criticism of Fitzgerald's work; but often enough, where the two lives overlapped, Wilson serves as a necessary corrective to Fitzgerald's gilded views of events.) Le Vot's *Fitzgerald* is nothing if not pertinent and thorough in its use of such detail. Although I have not read the French text, I suspect that part of the ringing authenticity of the book is also due to a highly readable translation

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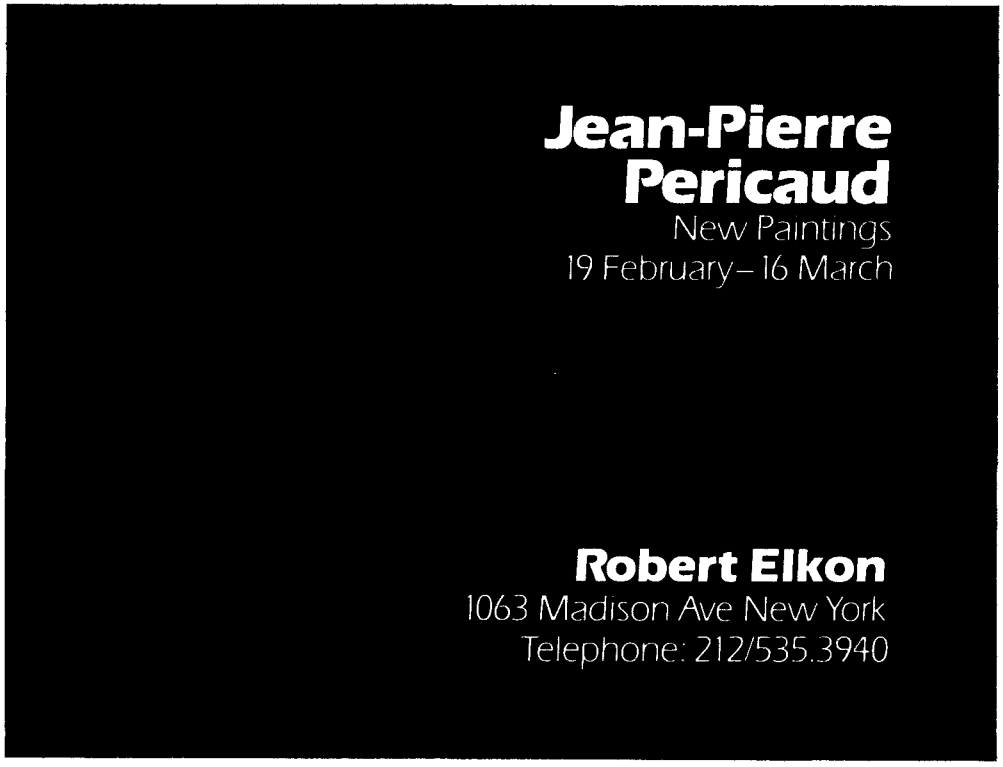

by William Byron that never seems to strike a false note.

Good as the book is, there are occasions when it is apparent that its original purpose was to acquaint French readers with the life of an American writer. There are strange perspectives and odd critical angles. Discussing Fitzgerald's youth, for instance, and the sequence of Basil Duke Lee stories that comprise Fitzgerald's snappy but innocent remembrances of childhood past, Le Vot summons up Marivaux and Mademoiselle de Scudéry, allusions which seem very wide of the mark. Fitzgerald's youthful fondness for boys' adventure tales and his readings of Booth Tarkington's Penrod stories would be more to the point.

More troublesome is Le Vot's attempt to connect Fitzgerald to the mainstream of existentialism that has cut a wide swath through modern French literature. Amory Blaine's sudden revulsion at kissing Myra St. Claire in *This Side of Paradise* Le Vot sees as an instance of Fitzgerald's "existential repugnance" toward the physiology of sex and the demands of the flesh. But the truth is a bit less complicated or cosmological; Amory's instinctive prudishness is an inheritance from the puritanical strain in Fitzgerald's Irish Catholic upbringing.

Considering Le Vot's attention to the life and his philosophical interest in Fitzgerald's ambivalent attitude toward sex and womanhood, he is strangely reticent about discussing Fitzgerald's pre-marital relationship with Zelda Sayre and the abortion (possibly more than one) that Zelda had had during their marital life. That information was indicated in the Fitzgerald documents that Le Vot studied at Princeton, documents that had been explored or mentioned in earlier biographies of the Fitzgeralds by Nancy Milford and Sara Mayfield, and that had more or less officially gone public in Matthew Bruccoli's massively detailed 1981 biography of Fitzgerald, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*. Fitzgerald's pre-marital relationship would seem to be the kind of case in which the facts of life would be more mean-

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ingful than literary or philosophical rhetoric.

Le Vot—rightly, I think—pays a good deal of attention to Fitzgerald's *Crack-Up* articles, published in *Esquire* in 1936. The three confessional essays mark the nadir of Fitzgerald's private and professional life, the point at which he was forced to acknowledge, without illusions, the effects of his alcoholism, his emotional breakdown, the shattering break-up of his marriage, the loss of friends who had grown tired of drunken scenes and quarrels, the decline of his literary reputation. (In 1934, royalties from all his previously published books amounted to only $58.35.) It was indeed Fitzgerald's moment of truth, his recognition of what the American Dream had cost him. Hemingway was particularly scornful of Fitzgerald's exposing himself so publicly. (Hemingway would, of course, do a much more humiliating job on Fitzgerald in letters to acquaintances after Fitzgerald's death and in his posthumously published memoir, *A Moveable Feast.*) But despite the bitter, self-pitying tone, the *Crack-Up* articles illustrate the ruthless self-honesty Fitzgerald could sometimes bring to both his life and his work—a quality that Hemingway, who was even more concerned than Fitzgerald with presenting a public image, seldom managed in his own career, least of all toward the end of his life.

Le Vot, citing contemporary French critics with approval, sees Fitzgerald's confessional articles as an existential act. Fortunately, he does not altogether agree with one of his authorities on angst, E. M. Cioran, who claims that Fitzgerald's abasement had not gone deep enough, that it had not led the writer "to mysticism or to final despair or to suicide"—evidently the desirable ends of the existential adventure. According to Cioran, Fitzgerald, being frivolous and second-rate, did not make the most of his crisis: "He went through a Pascalian experience without a Pascalian mind." However that may be, Fitzgerald did touch down on the bedrock of failure with intelligence enough to make one of those riveting personal observations that cause one to look again at even his minor stories. Making a distinction between himself and Hemingway, Fitzgerald wrote in his notebook: "I talk with the authority of failure—Ernest with the authority of success."

The focal point of Le Vot's critical analysis, actually the centerpiece of the book, is a lengthy discussion of *The Great Gatsby,* which extends through four or more chapters, weaving incidents from the life and examples from the Fitzgerald literature. (Even the weather in New York in a sweltering week in September 1922 comes into his discussion of Daisy's rejection of Gatsby in the Plaza Hotel.) His critical analysis has its moments of tedium, including a thirteen-page exploration of the symbolic function of the colors yellow and blue in Fitzgerald's fiction, but it avoids the fault of many academic exercises which, like insidious kudzu vines, end up by completely obscuring the structure they were meant to explain.

The one serious criticism that might be brought against the *Gatsby* discussion is that it is too carefully engineered toward another of the French connections Le Vot likes to make, this one dealing with a chance remark from the Goncourt journals, a prophetic vision of an "American-style god" presiding over the generations of the future:

> . . . his image no longer elastic and adaptable to painters' imaginations, no longer floating on Veronica's veil, but caught in a photographic portrait . . . . Yes, I picture a god who will appear in photographs and who will wear glasses.

Le Vot makes a dazzling connection between this and Fitzgerald's vision of the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg, the oculist's sign of a pair of disembodied eyes framed in yellow spectacles—the symbolic eyes of an all-seeing god—brooding over the ash heaps of the borough of Queens. One could, presumably, write an entire master's thesis on that chance conjunction—without, perhaps, touching base on the fact of whether Fitzgerald was aware of the Goncourt passage, much less influenced by it. The probability

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is that he was not. Although Fitzgerald was well enough acquainted with certain contemporary French writers—André Chamson and René Crevel, for instance—to recommend them to his American publishers, there is no evidence, so far as I know, that he had read the Goncourt brothers, nor does Le Vot indicate whether that particular passage from the voluminous journals had been published prior to 1924, when Fitzgerald began *The Great Gatsby*. The problem, I suspect, is that Le Vot is a much more intellectual writer than Fitzgerald, and he is generous, attributing to Fitzgerald insights and literary connections that are more properly his own and more related to the grand march of modern French literature than to Fitzgerald's somewhat circumscribed literary interests. But if for no other reason, I would be grateful to Le Vot's biography for the absolute clarity with which it reveals the inescapable influence of geography—and the critic's intellectual equipment—on the arguments of literary criticism. The critic is what he reads.

Every biographer of a writer who takes a life-approach to literary studies is, in a sense, in double jeopardy. He must know the literary heritage the writer drew from; he must also know the minutiae of the writer's daily life. Gossip and anecdotage are held in low esteem by historians and the more pure-bred literary critics. They prefer what are regarded as "primary sources," the letters, journals, diaries of the principals, either published or unpublished. But this documentation, being human, is as full of distortions, prejudices, and misinformation as the gossip and rumor of surviving friends and acquaintances purveyed in memoirs written many years later, when all the corpses are beyond legal recourse. It is only that in the contemporary letters we can generally assign a date to the first appearance of the lies.

In an afterword, Le Vot states: "So great is the power of the Fitzgerald legend that it is sometimes difficult to separate truth about him from apocrypha." So, he notes, he has gone through the documentary material and personal interviews with "greatest caution,

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preferring to rely on confirmed sources that are generally considered impartial." But even the most wary biographer is apt to be tripped up by the famous, who have as great a need to name-drop and embellish their relationships with the famous as the most casual acquaintance. On several occasions, Le Vot cites a reminiscence by George Jean Nathan, the drama critic and editor of *The Smart Set,* in which Nathan describes one of several joyous occasions when Fitzgerald, accompanied by Edmund Wilson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and several others—all of them drunk—were entertained by him in New York. The troop, "all in more or less exalted state," watched with amusement while Fitzgerald set fire to the rubber bindings of the sofa pillows: "Their howls of glee when the rubber started to stench up the place could be heard a block away." It is another of those minor, highly colored stories that paint the Jazz Age a brighter hue than was actually the case. It is sobering to learn, from still unpublished letters by Wilson, written while Nathan was alive, that Wilson had had only the briefest professional meetings with Nathan, had never been royally wined and dined by him, had never spent a boozy weekend with him at the Fitzgerald house in Westport, Connecticut, and that Nathan had been putting about stories that he had been instrumental in promoting Wilson's career. Wilson was of the opinion that both Nathan and H. L. Mencken were inclined to think they had done more for people and influenced them more than was in fact true.

Biography is, at best, a shaky discipline and one has to trace the network of personal relationships far out along the line in order to arrive at even a few conclusive proofs. Le Vot, with few exceptions, has corroborated his stories with thoroughness. He has written an exceptionally fine, serious, and sensitive study; his book will certainly put all future biographers of Fitzgerald on their mettle.

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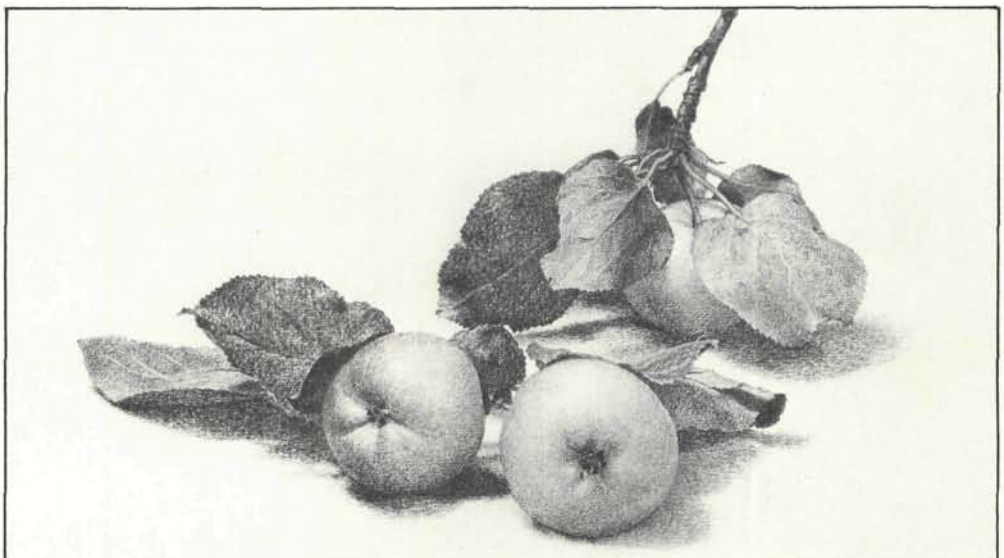

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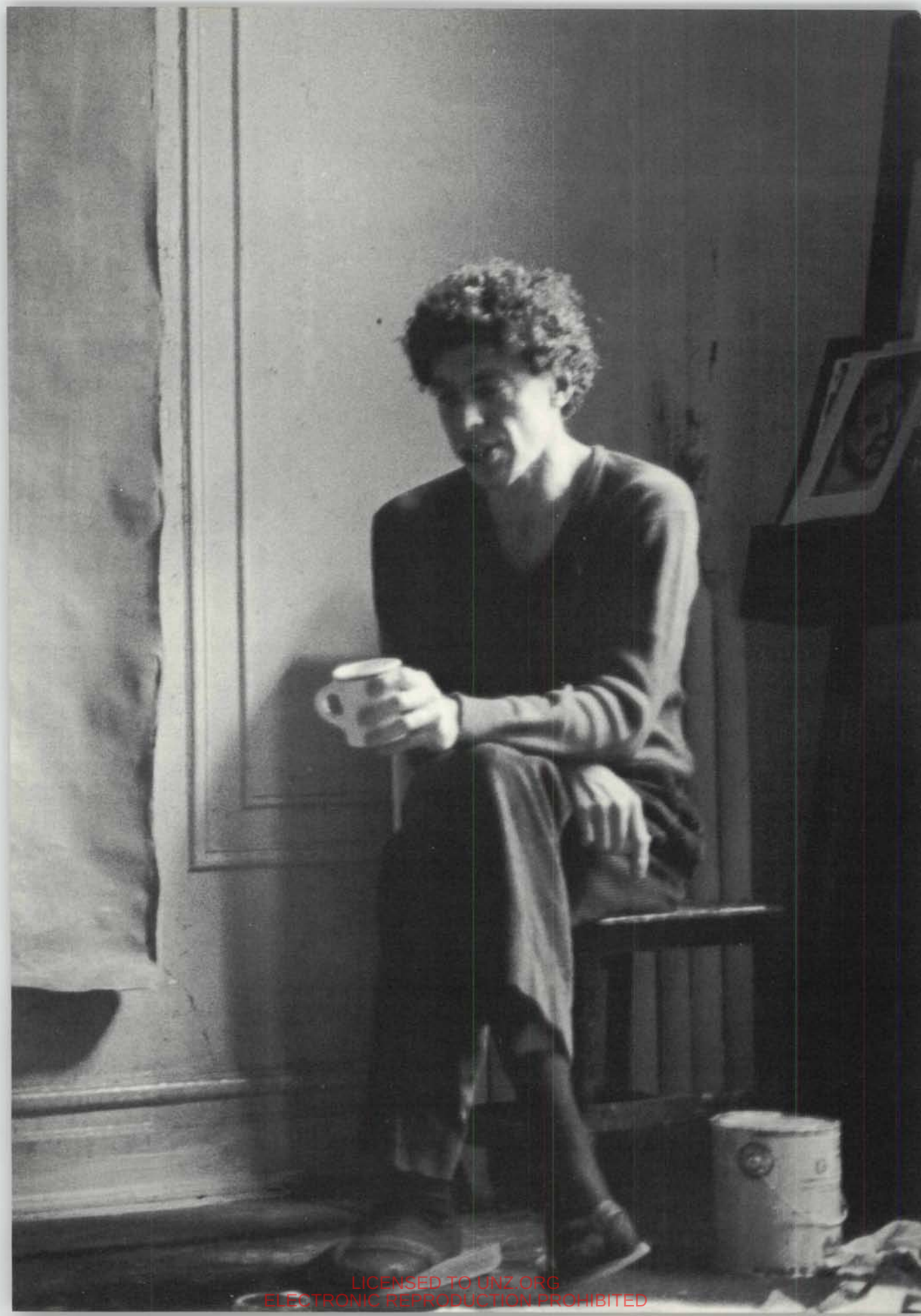

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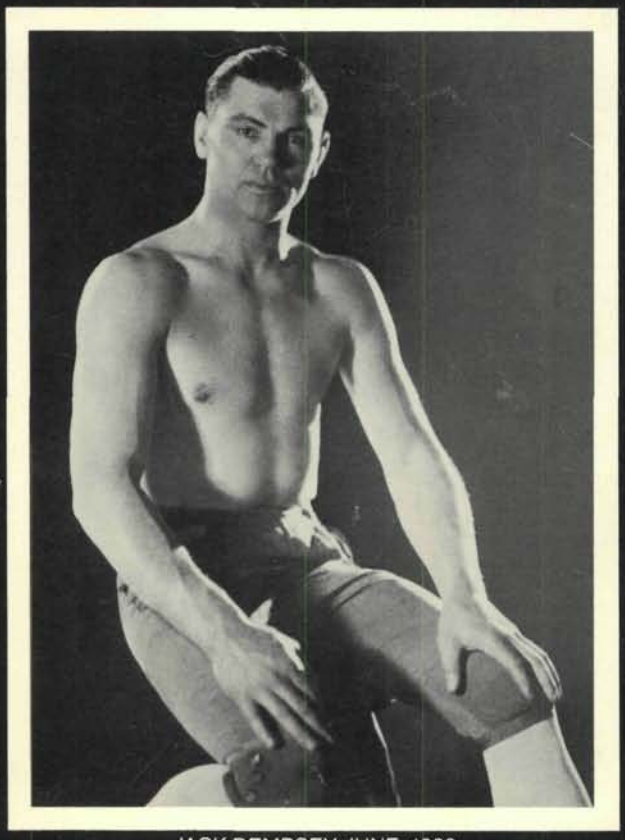

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